

THE PEACEMAKERS

BY
JOHN STRANGE WINTER





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Gertrude T. Pratt

BY JOHN STRANGE WINTER.



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A MAGNIFICENT YOUNG MAN.

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INTO AN UNKNOWN WORLD.

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THE PEACEMAKERS

BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER

AUTHOR OF "THE TRUTH-TELLERS,"
"ONLY HUMAN," ETC.



PHILADELPHIA

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—SOMETHING HAPPENS	5
II.—THE STORY OF A NEW RELIGION	14
III.—A PLUNGE INTO A STRANGE WORLD	21
IV.—JOHN STRODE	31
V.—THE STORY OF THE DIAMONDS	39
VI.—THE SANCTUARY OF THE PEACEMAKERS	51
VII.—MRS. MATTHEW	57
VIII.—ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN	66
IX.—UNDER THE VENEER	76
X.—THE DIFFERENCE IN A CHOICE	92
XI.—A THUNDERBOLT	100
XII.—NO ALTERNATIVE	122
XIII.—A WAY OUT OF THE DIFFICULTY	137
XIV.—ON A LONELY PATH	148
XV.—A RAY OF LIGHT	161
XVI.—THE LITTLE BIRD	171
XVII.—PLAIN SPEAKING	184
XVIII.—THOUGHTS	196
XIX.—A GREAT SOCIAL EVENT	207
XX.—A WALL OF ADAMANT	216
XXI.—BREAKING BOUNDS	227

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXII.—A MOMENTOUS INTERVIEW	240
XXIII.—THE WORM WILL TURN	252
XXIV.—ON A NEW ROAD	265
XXV.—HURRAH!	278
XXVI.—LOST!	291
XXVII.—THIRTY YEARS OF WAITING	304

THE PEACEMAKERS.

CHAPTER I.

SOMETHING HAPPENS.

It is wonderful to note as we go through life how, in a single moment, the whole current of our existence may be irrevocably changed.

A SUDDEN thrill shot through Florence Milvane's heart. It was not, as a general rule, a heart that was troubled with thrills or qualms of any kind, for Florence Milvane was a staid little woman who went to business in the City every morning at ten o'clock, who did her full share of work during a stated number of hours, and sometimes, if there happened to be a press of business on, for a longer time than the regulation slice of the day which constituted her working-time.

She was pretty,—yes, very pretty,—of a fair and ethereal type both of face and person; she had a sweet, refined voice, was worth just fifty shillings a week to her employers, shared rooms with a girl friend, went for bicycle rides on Saturday afternoons and generally on Sundays too, belonged to a choral society, and was just turned four-and-twenty.

As I have said, she was a staid little person, and in truth she had had enough experience of the sad side of life to make her so, for Flo, as her own people called her, was the eldest of a large and fatherless family. Her father had been in business in rather a large way, but he had died suddenly when comparatively young and had left his widow with about two hundred a year, on which she had to do the best she could for the young brood who had been accustomed to a large house run on generous lines.

Mercifully, the very young adapt themselves to change of circumstance with wonderful rapidity, and by the time Flo Milvane was turned seventeen she as naturally found herself looking out for something to do, as she would have naturally looked out for a situation as a domestic servant had her father happened to be a blacksmith.

She was not without influence, for Thomas Milvane had been a straight man possessed of many friends, and at least half a dozen business houses were ready with an offer of a place for his daughter. Her career in the City has little or nothing to do with this story. It is sufficient to say that after she entered upon it she never cost her mother a penny for her personal needs, and after twelve months had gone by she began to pay for her own board and lodging. Two years after this Mrs. Milvane fell in for a small inheritance, including a pleasant cottage

a few miles from London, and left her small abode at Brixton to go and dwell under her own vine and fig-tree in the country. It was at this period that Flo Milvane went into rooms together with a girl friend.

And, as I said before, when she was just turned four-and-twenty, a sudden thrill shot through her heart. The cause of the thrill was a young man, of course,—it almost goes without saying. There was, if the truth be told at once, a corresponding disturbance in the heart which beat beneath his smart frock-coat; there was a light in his blue eyes which found an answering shine in her gray ones; in short, these two, who had met and become acquainted in a dry-as-dust office over the details of most unsentimental bargains, fell in love with each other.

"Do you cycle, Miss Milvane?" he asked somewhat diffidently one day, when he had concluded the business part of his conversation.

She brightened up as a girl does when she is unexpectedly asked about a favourite pursuit.

"Oh, yes," she replied. "I cycle a lot; whenever I get the chance, in fact. I have a Swift,—a beauty."

"I ride a Beeston-Humber," he said, very seriously; "but I must say I've heard great things of Swifts. Are you—that is, would—I mean, are you ever open to a ride?"

"I don't often go out in the evening excepting in

summer," she replied; "but I go somewhere every Saturday afternoon and most Sundays."

"Would you go for a ride with me one day?" he asked, still more diffidently.

"I'd love to," she returned promptly.

"Say Saturday?" he suggested. It was then Thursday, he it known.

"I'd like it immensely."

"Where shall I come for you?"

"I live at Brixton," she replied. "I always go home to lunch and start about half an hour after."

"Then I'll come down for you. If I am there by two sharp, will that suit you?"

She replied that it would suit her exactly, and then he took down her address in his pocket-book, and they parted, he going out of the dingy office looking as pleased as possible, she remaining behind with her brain in a whirl and her heart all aglow.

During that Saturday's ride she learned a good deal about him and his belongings. His name, of course, she had known for a long time,—ever since one bright May morning when he had walked into the office saying that he had an appointment with Mr. Weaver, the head of the firm. She learned his Christian name for the first time during that first outing. It was Matthew,—Matthew Gorman. "My sisters call me Matt," he said, looking at her as if to see whether she approved of the name or not.

Flo was discreetly silent, and kept all her attention fixed upon her machine. They were spinning away down a pleasant and well-kept suburban road. "Jolly houses, these," said Matt Gorman, indicating the trim detached villas on either hand by a gesture of his arm.

"Delightful!" said Flo. "But they mean money, Mr. Gorman."

"To a certain extent," he rejoined, carelessly.

Flo Milvane laughed. "You may put it that way," she said, gaily, "but to me such a house as one of these implies an income of so much and no less."

"It would be easy enough for you to acquire such an income, Miss Milvane," he said, earnestly.

"I'd like to know how," she exclaimed, turning her dark-set gray eyes upon him.

"It's simple enough,—by marrying a man who can give it to you. Nothing could be easier," he said, quietly and yet with meaning.

She started and smiled. "Yes, that might be an easy way, and, on the other hand, it might not."

"Easy enough for you."

"Do you think so?" She felt what was coming, and her fencing was of a kind not intended to ward off his next words.

"Let's rest here awhile," he suggested. "There is actually a seat." He caught her bicycle from her

as she dropped lightly to the ground, and set it carefully against the paling which skirted the road.

"Do you know why I asked you to come out with me to-day?" he asked. "No? Then I'll tell you. I want you to marry me. I know that you don't know me so very well, but—but do you think it's necessary to know one another so very long beforehand? One glance was enough for me."

"Was it?" Her tone invited him to go on, and he took advantage of it.

"Wasn't it for you? Don't you think we were made for each other, you and I? I do. I'm a good sort of fellow,—we have a splendid business in Mullingham,—I'm partner with my father. You should have as good a house as any of these,"—with a jerk of his head towards the road down which they had just come.

She flashed a look at him. "And what should I, without a penny to my name, bring to you?"

"Yourself,—your sweet, charming, dainty, dear little self. Say yes, only say yes, and make me the happiest fellow in all England to-day."

"I—I might say yes,—but your people, your father and mother?" she began.

"My father and mother,—they won't interfere with me," he said, confidently.

"If I say yes, it must be conditionally on their consenting," she said at last.

"Good! Then it's the same thing as settled. What day will you go down to see them?"

"How far is it to Mullingham?"

"About four hours and a half."

"Because I—how am I to leave? I don't expect any holiday before Christmas,—I get three days then."

"Christmas!" he echoed with scorn. "And this the beginning of November! Pooh! I want to be married before that."

"Before Christmas!"

"Yes, of course; what's the good of wasting time waiting? I want my wife."

She looked at him from under her long eyelashes with a glance of admiration. "You have soon made up your mind," she said.

He drew her a trifle nearer to him. "A man who can't make up his mind on any subject *sharp* is an ass," he replied.

"Yes, but——"

"Tell me, haven't you already made up yours? I had you there, sweetheart, don't you think? Well, this is Saturday. I go home Tuesday, for I cannot get through my business before then. I shall write home Monday,—well, I shall write really to-morrow, but post it, of course, on Monday. If my mother writes to you by return, could you manage to go down on Saturday by the train from Euston at one

o'clock, which will land you at home just in time for dinner?"

"And when could I get back,—late on Sunday?"

"My people won't like your travelling on Sunday," he said, promptly; "but there's a train that leaves Mullingham at six in the morning which gets you at Euston at half-past ten. I'm afraid, my poor darling, you will land at your office more dead than alive, but——"

"Not at all. I've done the same thing before, many a time."

"And you can relieve your feelings by giving notice," he said, laughing.

"Not before you have seen my mother," she rejoined quickly and with a sudden accession of dignity in her tones.

He could not help smiling. "I thought you would take me down to see her to-morrow," he said, very meekly.

"Before your people have given their consent?" doubtfully.

"My people's consent is a foregone conclusion," he declared. "I believe there is a telegraph-office about a mile further on. Let us send a wire to your mother telling her to expect us to-morrow. Come."

"I see," said Flo, "that from this time forward

Florence Milvane will not know what it is to have any sort of a soul of her own."

"On the contrary," he said, quickly, "you will have two souls,—yours and mine. Come, let us push on. It is chilly here for you."

CHAPTER II.

THE STORY OF A NEW RELIGION.

A religion which was born and grew out of the unsatisfied longings of one bleeding human heart.

As soon as it was possible to do so, Florence Milvane received a letter from Matthew Gorman's mother. It was written on the thickest of paper, had a crest or device in the corner, and the address printed very clearly in dark-blue letters.

"THE ABODE OF PEACE, MULLINGHAM, November 16, 18—.

"MY DEAR MISS MILVANE,—My son has written to me of the new relation which has arisen between you and him, and I hasten to assure you that if your engagement to each other prove to be conducive to peace in our family circle, I shall very gladly and cordially welcome you to our midst. My son says there is a possibility of your being able to come down to pay us a short visit next Saturday. Any arrangement you make with him will be pleasant and convenient to me. I will reserve all further remarks until we meet, excepting just to say that the fact of my son's having chosen you for his wife prepossesses me in your favour, as he has not hitherto been a general admirer of our sex; and also the fact that you have made your consent consequent upon ours adds greatly to the feeling that he has chosen one who will only add to and not in any way take from our circle.

"Cordially yours,

"MARGARET GORMAN."

The handwriting was clear and strong, the caligraphy of a woman of education and of natural refinement. Something in the general tone of the letter struck the girl as forced and as unusual. And what a name for a house!—"The Abode of Peace." In her journeyings to and fro she daily passed "The Hut," "The Dove-Cot," "The Cedars," and "The Tower House," while "Windermere," "Hüonferme," "Ben Nevis," and "Merryfield" greeted her from time to time when she extended her walks or rides further afield. But "The Abode of Peace!" It was on a level with "The Ark of Noah." Of a certainty Florence Milvane was not a little mystified.

Then the phrasing of the letter itself, "If your engagement to each other prove to be conducive to peace in our family circle," and so on. What a very curious way of welcoming her son's *fiancée*! Of course it was true that some young wives did make things "hum" in their husband's family in a very unpleasant way. She had known several instances of girl-friends who had never seemed able to rest until they had alienated their husbands from all their own people, but she made no doubt that such desire had come upon them after the ceremony had been performed and not before it.

On the Wednesday morning Matthew Gorman came in to tell her that he had been detained in London by fresh business connected with the firm

and to ask her to dine with him and go to a theatre afterwards. "I shall go down to-morrow by the one o'clock train," he said.

She was, naturally enough, quite willing to share in the proposed programme, and when they had decided on both the place of dining and the theatre that they would go to, she told him that she had had a letter from his mother.

"I thought you would have. It was all right, of course; at least mine was."

"I'll show it to you to-night," she said, smiling up at him. "And now do go, for I'm fearfully busy."

He went off then, but was waiting in the street for her when she left the office. He had already dressed for the evening, so that he was able to go down to Brixton with her. As soon as they were settled in the railway carriage, she showed him the letter which she had received from his mother. He read it quickly through, put it in the envelope again, and gave it back to her.

"You see I was right," he said, smiling.

She hesitated a little. "Matt," she said at last, "would you mind—I mean, may I say, at least ask plainly—er—is there something—something unusual about your family?"

"Unusual! No, of course not," in accents of profound astonishment. "You're thinking that my mother's letter is a bit cold in tone? She's not a

gushing woman it's true, but a splendid character, and her friendship is worth having. And she has gone through a lot in her time, poor dear."

"I didn't mean that exactly," said Flo. "I've no love for gush, I can assure you. What I meant was—well, it's such a queer name for a house, the Abode of Peace."

Matt Gorman burst out laughing. "By Jove," he exclaimed, "I forgot to tell you about that, you poor, little, puzzled, mystified thing. Upon my word, I'm so happy it has pretty well driven everything else out of my head. The truth is, my darling, that my father and mother, especially my father, are not church people——"

"Methodists!" she exclaimed.

"No, by Jove; it would be better if they were. The fact is that many years ago my father got a great shock—and he invented, or practically invented, a new religion."

"Good gracious! And what do they call themselves?"

"The Peacemakers," he answered.

"The Peacemakers!" she echoed. "And how does it work?"

"Well, they have a little chapel. I think the entire congregation is under fifty souls. My father pays the piper and generally sets the tune. There's a minister, a nice old chap who has seen a good

deal of the storm and stress of life and is thankful to have found a haven of refuge for the end of his days. His daughter plays the organ—yes, they've got an organ; rather a nice one; the governor gave a hundred and fifty pounds for it—and she runs the Sunday-school."

"And your sisters?"

"They? Well, they used to do a bit in the Sunday-school, but there are only seven or eight children now, as it happens, and somehow they don't feel active over it."

"But what do they believe—the Peacemakers, I mean?"

"Upon my word, I hardly know. In peace, of course,—that first and foremost. You see, it came about in this way. My father was the son of a widower, who married three times after my grandmother died. Each fresh wife was worse and more interfering and quarrelsome than the last one, and when, at last, wife No. 4 succeeded in breaking off my father's engagement to the girl of his heart, he came to a way of thinking that if only a poor soul could have peace everything in life would be easy. The girl married somebody else and died early, and after that my father came in for his father's business and the bulk of his property, and he founded the sect of the Peacemakers."

"Does it work?" asked Flo.

"In a way, yes. The old man is happy enough, and my mother, who joined the sect years ago, before she was married, lives up to all his principles both in letter and spirit. For myself, I'm so used to the—the—every-day habit of it all that I think no more about it than church people think of themselves as miserable sinners, unless—that is—something calls it especially to mind."

"Then you are a Peacemaker by birth and habit, not by conviction," she suggested.

"Exactly so; and, therefore, I don't think very much about it one way or another. Of course, you know, there's nothing so red-hot as a 'vert to any faith."

They reached Brixton Station then, so did not pursue the subject further. Flo, her curiosity being satisfied, was not very keenly interested. She was young, she was very much in love, and she was on the eve of making what for her circumstances was a brilliant marriage. She was very soon going to forget that she had ever lived on fifty shillings a week, —she was going to be well off, to have a seal-skin jacket and several servants. All the old pinching days of work and comparative poverty would soon be at an end; and in the happy prospect of an affluent career with Matt Gorman she was not minded to search very closely for the pea of discord which might be found under eleven mattresses, as was found

by the princess in the old fairy-tale. If Matt's father and mother liked to indulge themselves in a religion all of their own, particularly such a very mild and harmless one as theirs seemed to be, why, it did not hurt anyone else, and would hurt her least of all. Indeed, although a very good little churchwoman who scarcely ever missed a Sunday morning service, she made up her mind that, if it would please them for her to become a Peacemaker, she would join the new sect from the day of her marriage,—yes, that she would. And as she dressed in haste a mist of tears came before her eyes at the thought of the broken hearts upon which the religion of the Peacemakers had been founded,—the wonderful faith which had been built upon a foundation of pain.

CHAPTER III.

A PLUNGE INTO A STRANGE WORLD.

One of the most curious sensations in life is that which a young woman experiences when she first goes to be inspected by her future husband's near relations.

It was with strangely mingled feelings that Florence Milvane left Euston the following Saturday at one o'clock that she might go down to Mullingham to make the acquaintance of her future husband's family. It was, in the first place, a dreadful ordeal for a girl to undergo,—to make a visit for the purpose of being inspected. In the second place, she was hardly, as yet, well enough used to Matt to feel really at ease. And to be with him among a wholly strange family who all knew him extremely well rendered the situation still more appalling. However, Matt himself appeared at the last stopping-place, some twenty-five miles on the London side of Mullingham, and Matt looked so smart and nice in his country clothes, and was, moreover, so unfeignedly delighted to see her, that she straightway forgot her fears and gave herself up to the pleasure of seeing him again.

Some of the qualms came back again as they ran

into Mullingham Station, and when Matt, looking out of the window, said,—

“Hollo! there’s Polly on the platform,—*and* Matty. I do call that decent of them.” She looked eagerly out to see two tall, stylish-looking girls eagerly scanning the windows of the carriages.

“There he is,” she heard one say to the other amid shouts of “Mull’gham, Mull’gham,” and the next minute they had rushed to the door and were trying to open it.

“Here you are,” called out one in a loud, hearty voice. “We were so afraid you would miss the train or something,” cried the other. “Welcome to Mullingham,” cried the two, as Flo reached the platform.

She was small and slight and they were tall and well grown, and she seemed to disappear under the overpowering warmth of their welcome. “You *are* a dear little thing,” exclaimed Matty. “And we are so glad to see you. You look after her luggage and we’ll go straight to the carriage. Yes,” as they led her off,—“you don’t know how glad we are that Matt isn’t going to marry a Mullingham girl. We don’t know one that we should really like.”

“One,” corrected Polly.

“Amy? Well, yes; we shouldn’t have minded Amy, but she is engaged to some one else, and besides that, Matt never could bear her. There are

plenty of nice girls in Mullingham,—oh, yes, heaps of them,—but not to be sisters-in-law somehow.”

“I always think it’s better to marry away from one’s own place, and then families don’t get to quarrelling over the young couple’s affairs,” Polly chimed in. “This way—yes, that’s the carriage. John, this is Miss Milvane. He’s been with us twenty years, so speak to him,” she added in a loud whisper to Flo.

Flo at once put out her hand to the old coachman. “How do you do?” she said in her sweet voice.

“You’re right welcome, miss,” said John, touching his hat, and then taking the proffered hand. “The Lord shed His blessings on you, miss, and give you peace in all your life. Mr. Matthew’s a rare fine fellow, miss; I’ve known him twenty years.”

Flo felt inclined to choke, and hardly knew what to say. Matty, however, being better used to the ways of the Peacemakers,—for John was a confirmed Peacemaker,—relieved the situation easily enough.

“Ah, you always spoil Mr. Matthew, John; but it’s a shame to show your partiality as you do. You wouldn’t say as much for any of your young ladies. Now, Flo dear, get in, and we’ll get in with you till Matt comes.”

“Till Matt comes?” Flo exclaimed.

“Yes, of course. Why, you don’t suppose we are

such idiots as to drive home with you? Good gracious, what do you take us for?"

"Of course you will. Is it far—your house?"

"A mile or so; we shall be there almost as soon as you will. Besides, we have something to do in the town."

"The carriage can stop," said Flo, eagerly. She felt instinctively that her entrance into the domestic circle would be easier if these two fine outspoken girls were with her.

"And earn Matt's hatred for ever. Oh, here he is."

"Matt," said Flo, eagerly, "your sisters want to walk—just because I'm here."

"Oh, they needn't do that," he replied.

"My dear," said Matty, "I assure you we never get into the old tub if we can help it. Go along with Matt, you dear, unselfish little thing, and don't waste a thought upon us. What you mustn't waste is time, for mother is very anxious to see you."

Flo caught hold of her future sister-in-law's hand. "Matty," she said, earnestly, "*do* you think she'll like me?"

"Yes,—and you will like her. She's sweet, sweet. Oh,"—in an almost fierce whisper,—"*that's* no word for mother. She's a saint, if ever one trod the earth."

The significance of her tone struck the girl, who was a stranger, as with a flash of pain; but before she could speak Matt touched her arm, saying,

"Now, if you are quite ready, dearest;" and the next moment she found herself in the carriage, which immediately rolled away from the blazing station lights into the comparative darkness of the gas-lit road.

She realized long before she got to the Abode of Peace that it was a good deal more than a mile from the station. It seemed a very long time before Matt said, "Ah, here we are," and the carriage was stopped that the entrance-gates might be opened.

And then a curious little ceremony was gone through. A bright-faced woman came to the door of the carriage, saying, in a solemn voice, "Peace be on you," to which Matt replied in a cheery tone, "And on you also." Then the carriage rolled on into the darkness of a longish avenue.

Arrived at the house itself, Flo was cheered by the streams of light which flooded out upon them. A gray-haired butler came down the wide steps as they drew up, and opened the door with the same solemn yet comforting greeting, "Peace be on you."

"And on you also," Matt replied; then added, "This is the future Mrs. Matthew, William."

"Welcome to the Abode, miss," said William. "The mistress has been rare and anxious,—there she is, Mr. Matthew."

To her dying day Flo knew that she would never forget her first sight of Matthew Gorman's mother.

She came out to the door quickly yet without hurry.

"Is that you, Matthew?" she said, softly. "Have you brought her? Ah, yes. Welcome to the Abode of Peace, my dear," she said, and drew the girl into the full light of the large and handsome hall. After a single glance at the girl's fair, sensitive face, she put both her arms round her and kissed her very kindly. "Oh, my dear, my dear, I see you with my boy's eyes! May this prove an Abode of Peace to you all the days of your life; but"—her voice sinking to a bare whisper—"let it be an abode of *real* peace,—real, true, peaceful peace. I can wish you nothing better."

Then she released her, and, still keeping fast hold of her hand, she drew her across the large hall. "Come," she said, gently, "your father is in the library."

Flo went unresistingly. She was not a little awed by the continual reiteration of the watchword of the Peacemakers. It affected her as she might have been affected by some solemn ritual or by some semi-sacred play, and, as yet, it seemed impossible for her to realize that Matt and his sisters were one and the same family as Mrs. Gorman and her dependants.

Perhaps some noise of their arrival had penetrated to the library, which she afterwards found was Mr. Gorman's particular sanctum, for as they crossed the

hall the door opened and he appeared upon the threshold.

He was very tall and spare, a man of over sixty years old, dark-eyed and eagle-faced, with a mass of snow-white hair crowning him. As they approached he raised both his hands in solemn benediction. "The Lord's peace be upon you all," he said, in a deep, sonorous voice; then, as his hands fell, he held them out towards her in welcome. "I am glad to see you; you are most welcome to my house."

"Thank you very much," murmured Flo. Her words sounded desperately commonplace to her own ears by comparison with the picturesque unusualness of the style of greeting which had met her in this new circle. Somewhat—nay, I should say not a little—to her relief, she found that the solemn tone and stilted phraseology were not continuously kept up when once the benedictory greetings were over, but that the elder members of the family relapsed into more ordinary forms of conversation, Mrs. Gorman becoming entirely everyday in tone, though the old gentleman still retained a few traces of his old-fashioned formality.

"Bring her to the morning-room, Matthew," said Mrs. Gorman. "The tea is waiting there. The poor child must be famished after so long a journey. Are you coming with us, father?"

"Surely," he replied; and added, as they passed

through the hall, "I, too, want to see something of Matthew's choice,—the girl of his heart."

At this Matt laughed and caught hold of her hand. And Flo laughed too, a laugh of such utter happiness that Mrs. Gorman turned and looked at her.

"Mrs. Gorman, don't you feel well?" Flo asked. "You are so pale."

"Am I?" and she put up her hand to her face as if she could tell by touching it whether it was white or not. "Oh, it is nothing. I am not always strong, and I am naturally without colour. Shall I make your tea? Cream and sugar?"

"Yes, both, please," Flo answered. "I am not new-fashioned enough to do without sugar, though sometimes I feel desperately dowdy when I confess to liking two lumps."

"I should dislike any one who gave up sugar because it was the fashion," said Mrs. Gorman, decidedly. "Try some of those little sandwiches, dear,—it wants more than two hours to dinner-time, and you must be hungry."

"Yes, try some of them,—egg and chickweed," laughed Matt, "with some curious flavouring introduced which makes you fancy they are anchovy or *caviare* or something of that. I tell my mother that she is a perpetual fraud in the way of cooking."

Thus bidden, Flo did try the sandwiches and

found them excellent. In truth, she was hungry, and it was no small relief to find that hunger was not considered a sin in the Abode of Peace. She had just taken her third one when the door was thrown open with a jerk, and two girls, whom she had not seen before, came in. "We passed Polly and Matty on the road just now," one said. "Peace be with you father, dear.—How do you do? We are to call you Flo straight off, of course. Very glad to see you," kissing her rather boisterously. "Hope you'll like us and be happy among us. Darling mother," dropping a light kiss upon the heavy braids which crowned her mother's head, "here is your silk; the best match Miss Glover had. If it won't do, she will have to send to London for it."

"Thank you, dear child. Flo, this is our youngest girl, Rachel. And this is Beth. Now you have seen us all, for I suppose Polly and Matty came to meet you."

"Yes, and would walk home when there was plenty of room in the carriage," replied Flo, vexedly.

Mrs. Gorman smiled. "Ah, well, they are young and like exercise," she said, indulgently, and then Flo saw her glance over to the tall old man on the other side of the well-kept fireplace.

Rachel Gorman was the only one of the five children who in any way resembled her father. Matt

and his three sisters, Polly, Matty, and Beth, were all of the same blond complexion as their mother. In the case of Matt this complexion was considerably browned by exposure, and the faces of the girls were tinged with a charming apple-blossom pink, evidently just what their mother had possessed at their age. But Rachel was quite unlike them, being very much taller than any of her sisters, dark-haired and dark-eyed, with a brilliant colour like a blush rose. She was the only one of them all who was conspicuously slight like a willow wand, and in her cycling skirt she looked even taller than she might otherwise have done. She had a fascinating trick of turning her head and setting it a little sideways in a way which showed her long slender throat off to perfection. "Oh, Matt," Flo whispered suddenly to her sweetheart, as they all made a move to their own rooms, "how could you look at me when you have such a sister as that?"

"Do you mean Rachel?" he asked, in genuine surprise. "Well, of course, a man cannot marry his sister, no matter what she happens to be like; and, between ourselves, I don't admire gawky girls at all."

CHAPTER IV.

JOHN STRODE.

Sometimes the presence of a stranger in a family gathering comes as a distinct relief.

THE four sisters in a body escorted Flo to her bedroom. "Now you need not feel lonely," said Matty, "because your room is next to dear mother's; Polly and I have rooms on your other side, and Beth and Rachel are just opposite. This is not the very best room, but you must not think that we meant any slight not to have given you that. It is right away at the further end of the corridor, and mother thought you might be lonely there. We generally give this room to girl visitors because they like to be near us."

Flo looked around the spacious room, at the cheerful fire blazing in the bright steel grate, the delicately tinted rose-lined draperies of windows and bed, at the soft rose-strewn carpet, the pretty, convenient white enamelled furniture, the little dainty odds and ends in all parts of the room. Then with a sudden gush of feeling she caught Matty's hand.

"Oh!" she cried, "do you think I've come down here to carp and pick holes? Has Matt told you

everything? That I earn my own living in an office and live in cheap lodgings with another girl? Has he told you all?"

"Well, I think he has," said Matty, "and, of course, we would wish, and especially mother would wish, to do you all the honour we can. Of course we admire you very much for earning your own living, and all that. We couldn't do it ourselves. You see, we have always been rich and never had to think of those things, but if we had to turn out we should make a mighty poor try at it, I'm afraid."

"Awful," chimed in Beth.

"As for your living in lodgings and having no fortune, what's that to us? You are Matt's choice, and a very good choice, too, and a lucky day for Matt when you fell in love with each other."

"For Matt!" echoed Flo, pausing in her work of laying out her dress for the evening.

"Yes, for Matt. We are rich and respectable and all that, but we're not everybody's money, and we know it, far better than anybody who can tell us."

"But why?"

"My dear," Matty cried, "it wants but twenty minutes to dinner, and I have laced boots on. Let us discuss our respective merits at a more convenient season. Is anybody coming to dinner?"

"Yes,—Mr. Strode," answered Beth, as she hurried away.

"Mr. Strode! My poor child, I'm so sorry. I suppose he was asked before we heard of your coming. He has to be invited sometimes for business reasons, and he would like to marry Rachel."

"You needn't remind me, Matty," cried Rachel, furiously, the blush rose of her cheeks deepening to a flaming colour and her dark eyes flashing fire.

"I alluded to it as your misfortune," laughed Matty; but Rachel had flown out of the room, shutting the door behind her with a crash.

"Poor Rachel, she's very tender on the subject of Mr. Strode. If you want to put her in a boiling passion, you've only got to say Rachel Strode to do it. Well, I'm off. By-by."

Flo Milvane dressed herself in a maze of wonderment. What did Matty mean by saying that they were not everybody's money? And for the Abode of Peace, how odd to give a newcomer into the family a recipe for putting one of them into a boiling passion. And what was the meaning of that curious, wistful, strained, questioning look on Mrs. Gorman's pale face, the face which was refined and had been very pretty once, but which had such an unnaturally bleached look? It was all very strange, but as she put the last touches to her toilette a remembrance of Matthew came to her, dear Matt, rich, clever, stalwart, and simple, and she forgot to wonder any more.

Flo had not made any great attempt at evening dress. She wore her best black skirt, a silk one bought at one of the many sales in Regent Street, and with it a smart high blouse of soft rose-coloured material. This had been bought specially on the previous day after leaving the office, and was a smarter thing of its kind than she had ever indulged herself in before. It had many tucks and puffs and gatherings, and suited her fair slight prettiness to perfection.

As a matter of fact, she had hesitated some little time between this and a black one made on similar lines, and more than once after her choice had been made she had almost regretted it, fearing that it was too dressy. She found, however, on entering the drawing-room at the Abode of Peace, that she need have had no fears on that score. All the girls were in evening dress, their bodices cut low and their sleeves reaching to the elbow. Mrs. Gorman was wearing a handsome brown velvet gown trimmed about the square-cut bodice with rich old lace, and on her bosom a few diamonds twinkled brilliantly. Matt came in immediately, wearing a theatre jacket, and soon after the old gentleman made his appearance too, but wearing a swallow-tail and a shirt frill.

"John Strode is late," said Mr. Gorman, taking out his watch.

"I hear his cart," returned Matt, bending his head to listen.

A minute or two later the door opened, and William ushered in the visitor.

"The Lord's peace be on you," said the master of the house, solemnly.

"And on you, my friend," was the reply, "and on all your household. How are you? Pretty fit, I hope. Mrs. Gorman, I hope I see you well. Miss Matty, you are blooming as a rose. Miss Rachel, peace be on you." He held out his hand to the girl, who was standing near to the fireplace, and she unwillingly laid hers in it. "Peace be on you," he repeated.

"And on you also," she replied in a tone so rude and brusque that Flo Milvane opened her eyes wide with astonishment, and a suppressed giggle behind her betrayed the fact that the other members of the family were not blind to what was going on. Then Rachel snatched away her hand with an expression on her face in which peace was wholly lacking.

"Dinner is served. Let it be eaten in peace," announced William in a loud voice at this moment, and Flo turned to lay her hand on Mr. Gorman's arm with a deeper sense of relief than she had ever known what it was to experience in all her life before.

The dining-room was a large and finely proportioned apartment severely furnished in yellow oak,

which matched the doors, the skirtings, and the tall chimney-shelf. The chairs were cushioned with deep red leather, and had very tall, high backs. She perceived that the family custom was for each person to stand behind their chair and to rest the hands upon the back thereof while grace was uttered by the head of the house. As a grace it certainly had to Flo the attraction of novelty.

“The Lord gave this food for our good; let us eat it in thankfulness and peace.”

Flo was not a little awed by the sight of the tall, picturesque old man, in his semi-old-world attire, standing with hands outstretched in benediction over the elegantly arranged table, and it was with a sharp shock that her eyes next fell upon Rachel Gorman's darkly mutinous glances at the visitor whom she had contrived to balk by putting the entire length of the table between them.

She stole a look at Mr. Strode then to see whether he was much upset by this manœuvre, but apparently he had expected nothing else, for he was talking already to Mrs. Gorman as if his interest in the youngest of her daughters was no more than in any other member of the family.

I have not explained that Mr. and Mrs. Gorman occupied the two centre seats at the table, so that Mr. Gorman was able to talk a good deal to the guest, and Flo was thus left free to devote most of

her attention to her *fiancé*. She was also able to hear most of Mr. Strode's conversation.

"Awful brute, isn't he?" murmured Matt in her ear.

"Is he so bad?" whispered Flo back again.

"Yes, most emphatically yes," was Matt's vigorous reply.

Flo made no rejoinder, but all the same she had expected a very much worse specimen than this John Strode. He was not old or fat, nor did he misuse his aspirates; his garments were as well cut as Matt's, and his person was thoroughly well groomed and refulgent with cleanliness. He had no particular display of jewelry beyond one little diamond in his shirt-stud and a plain gold signet ring on one hand. He had not even a locket on his watch-chain. His voice was not unpleasant, though he pronounced one or two words in an irritatingly peculiar fashion.

At last, however, she received a clue, for Mr. Strode happened to mention a certain Major O'Reilly, on which Mr. Gorman said promptly that he was a person of whom he had no opinion.

"An irredeemable scamp," chimed in Matt, from his place on the other side of Flo.

"Oh, I don't know," said John Strode, pursing up his lips. "Major O'Reilly must be a hundred-thousand-pound man at least. He has a good deal of influence. Not, of course, that money always does it. There's Harry de Kloof,—worth half a million

at least, and the county won't have him because of that little affair about those diamonds. But it seems a shame, doesn't it?"

"What was that?" whispered Flo to Matt. Matt looked up. "Harry de Kloof is another of the same sort, or worse," he said, coolly. "Get money: get it honestly if you can, but—get money. By the way, what was the right story about those diamonds?"

Thus started, John Strode launched forth promptly into the true story of Harry de Kloof and the diamonds.

CHAPTER V.

THE STORY OF THE DIAMONDS.

The wise man to whom we owe the Book of Proverbs tells us that the price of a virtuous woman is far above rubies. How many a woman's virtue has come to grief over diamonds!

"WELL, now, I have always rather pitied poor Harry in that matter," he said, confidentially. "Yes, reelly. After all, business is business, and when ladies take to doing shady things I can't see that they ought to get off scot-free because they happen to be called 'Your Ladyship.' And, after all, poor Harry did no more than he was well within his right in doing,—he didn't, reelly."

"Yes, but," persisted Matt, "what was the story? I have only a confused sort of remembrance of it."

"It was like this. Lady Mullingham—the Countess, you know—is rather a go-ahead little lady, who married the Earl more for his position and money than anything else. She was the daughter of an Irish peer, very pretty and a great flirt, and they did say she was over head and ears in love with some fellow in the Lancers, and that her family wouldn't let her have him. So, in a sort of half-huff, half-desperation, she took the next good match that happened to come along, and that was Lord Mulling-

ham, just twenty years older than she was, but the Earl of Mullingham and what seemed like the riches of Cræsus to her, who had never had the spending of too much at a time. Of course, he did not know anything about the fellow in the Lancers, and was awfully smitten with her, and he indulged her in everything she wanted. And she wanted more and more every day. Her dresses, her jewels, her whims and caprices simply ran money away like water. She seemed just reckless, as if she did not care what she spent. I've seen her chuck down her sable cloak, that cost nine hundred guineas, as if it was an old rag that hadn't cost a guinea! I have, reelly. Well, this, as you all must remember, went on for four or five years. Lord, how she made the money fly! All her toilet services were of the finest Worcester china, decorated with her coronet and cipher entwined in wealth of roses and forget-me-nots, and cost fifteen guineas a set. All her own room was furnished with the same idea. Her name was Rosamund. She had great artists down from London to paint her ceilings, and her doors, and white enamelled wardrobes and things; the carpets were like soft moss strewn with roses you could pick up. I saw them at Moorman's before they were sent to the Castle, and they cost fifty guineas each, and everything else was done in the same way. She had at least half a dozen bicycles enamelled to match the dress

she might happen to be wearing. The best horses, the finest hunters, the smartest ponies, prize cats, the champion Great Dane, and, in short, she went the pace,—just tremendous. And at last the Earl pulled up short and said she'd have to draw in her horns a bit. Of course, he was master, he paid the piper, and for several years—that is, ever since he married her—she chose the tune, and when he did pull her up short she did not dare tell him what her liabilities reelly amounted to. For a bit she tried spending a little less, and even went so far as to make believe that over-dressing was vulgar, and to use all her pretty face and her influence to what she called the revival of simplicity. Lord love you! she even got up a league and called it the Guild of Simplicity, and took to wearing plain black gowns and plain black sailor hats, with a neat little bonnet, like a Puritan, for grand occasions. But it did not catch on much, and the dressmakers took to threatening her. She had five hundred a year pin-money, but five hundred a year don't go far when you owe fifteen thousand, and her ladyship soon found herself in desperate straits and didn't know which way to turn. She was afraid to ask the Earl for any more, for he was getting a bit off and not quite so infatuated with her as he had been, and they do say that he dropped down to it that she didn't care a button for him. And it was then that she bethought herself of Harry de

Kloof. He, of course, had not long before bought the Carstairs out of Allingham Towers, and was very anxious to get into the county set. Every one believed that he was on the Stock Exchange, and in time he might have come to it, particularly if he had married a county girl, and had made the settlements big enough. As it was, Fate—with the help of an impudent tramp who thought he had got a pretty lady on a bicycle at his mercy—sent him the Countess's way, and she took his card and his escort home, and insisted on Lord Mullingham going personally to thank him. The Earl grumbled pretty much, said he was a low, money-lending Jew, and that a letter of thanks would be enough. However, eventually he went over to Allingham Towers and did the civil as graciously as he could bring himself to do. Then he thought the whole affair ended; but her ladyship, who was a little flirt still at bottom, struck up a kind of friendship with Harry on the sly, and at last she told him what awful straits she was in for money, and entreated him to save her. Now, Harry de Kloof was, of course, a Jew and a money-lender, and the old instinct was strong in him. So he told her he would lend her as much as she needed if she would give him some security in the way of jewelry. So what does the little Countess do but take over a heap of her jewels to Allingham Towers and put it into his hands.

“‘I suppose this is all your own?’ he asked.

“‘Yes, of course,’ she replied. ‘It was mostly given to me at the time of my marriage.’

“So Harry advanced her a couple of hundred pounds on it and put the jewels in his safe. ‘You’d better just put your name to this in case anything happens to me,’ he said, and she signed the paper without even looking at it.

“‘I am to pay you back in six months,’ she said, as she put the notes away in her purse.

“‘Yes, and I keep the jewels mean time,’ he answered.

“‘Oh, I’ll soon save that out of my pin-money,’ she said, gaily enough.

“But, poor little soul, that two hundred only stopped the maw of the dressmakers for a few weeks, and not a penny did she save before the six months had run out. By that time a hint of her friendship with Harry had got to the Earl’s ears, and she found herself under pretty close observation. At the end of the time he wrote to her and told her the time was up and that he wanted the money or some other consideration. With great difficulty she managed to meet him, when he made himself clear. ‘Look here, Lady Mullingham,’ he said,—and mind you, I had the story straight from Harry himself,—‘I’ve got your jewels and you owe me two hundred pounds. That is a mere flea-bite; but you can do something for me,

and I shall be ready to cry quits as soon as you like. I'm a rich man, a half-million man, and I want to get into society. I want to be in the county set. Now, if you like, you can do what I want. Ask me to dinner at the Castle—a real slap-up dinner-party, say of twenty-four or thirty of the best people you know—and I'll forgive you the debt and hand you over the jewels within twenty-four hours. Now, what do you say?

“‘Why, just this,’ she said: ‘five years ago I could have done it as easily as I can snap my fingers; but now his Lordship’—yes, she called her husband his Lordship as if by instinct, and that upset Harry more than anything—‘is so annoyed with me for having spent such a lot of money that he is not as easy to manage as he once was. Oh, Mr. de Kloof,’ she exclaimed, ‘are you set on conquering the county? They are so stupid and dull, these county people, they are *not* worth it.’

“‘But Harry was as obstinate as a mule. ‘It’s my whim,’ he said, doggedly, ‘and I am willing to pay for it. Think, Lady Mullingham,—two hundred pounds. It’s a big price to pay for one dinner-party.’

“‘Yes, but it’s a big thing to ask,’ she replied. ‘You want to meet all the pick of the neighbourhood, and the question is, do the pick of the neighbourhood want to meet you?’

“ ‘Very likely not,’ said Harry. ‘But that doesn’t concern you. I only want my opportunity,—the rest is my affair. Now, what do you say? Will you do it or not?’

“ ‘It does not rest with me,’ she said. ‘I would do it like a shot, I’d do almost *anything* for two hundred pounds. However, as I said, it does not rest with me. I’ll do my best, but I must have my husband’s leave. That’s essential.’

“ ‘Can’t you ask whom you like to your own home?’ he said, and he owns that he couldn’t help a bit of a sneer at that.

“ ‘No,’ she said, ‘I can’t. I can do a good deal on my own responsibility, but I can’t do that.’ And so they left it.

“ Harry never knew how she worked it, but two days later he received an invitation from the Earl and Countess of Mullingham for a dinner-party to take place three weeks later. He joyfully accepted, and stuck the card up in his dining-room and took care that every one of the few people he knew knew that he had been invited to dinner at Mullingham Towers with three weeks’ notice. Well, he went on quite happily till the very day, when, about four o’clock in the afternoon, he received a note from Lord Mullingham saying that he regretted that, owing to Lady Mullingham’s sudden indisposition, he would not be able to receive him that evening.

Harry went out and saw the groom, enquired tenderly as to her ladyship's condition, but got nothing at all out of the man, who simply said that he did not happen to have seen her ladyship that day, and knew nothing of what went on indoors. Harry went over to call the next day, and the flunky who came to the door told him that her ladyship was somewhat better but was not receiving. So Harry handed in his card and got back into his carriage and pair again, and he says he had a sort of feeling all the time that something was wrong; but that I dare say wasn't presentiment at all, but only the uncomfortableness of being looked over by the flunkey of the house he wanted to know intimately and couldn't get to. He *sent* over the next day, and the answer was that her ladyship was all right again, and he naturally enough began to watch for the dinner invitation again. And then he happened to hear that the *dinner-party had taken place after all.*"

The narrator paused and looked round the table to give full effect to his words. The entire family—who never happened to have heard the full version of the story before—uttered an exclamation as if by one consent, "Well?" And even Rachel forgot that she never showed the smallest interest in anything that John Strode said, and leaned forward as eagerly as the rest.

"Well," John Strode went on, "that was an awful

blow to poor old Harry; he couldn't believe it,—he couldn't, reelly. He enquired about a bit and found that it was perfectly true, that on the very same evening that he'd been put off with an excuse as to her ladyship's indisposition a dinner of thirty had been given at the Castle. He came in to my place and stormed and raved, said he'd have the best of the little devil yet, and a good deal more, and the very next day I happened to be talking to him about a horse in Anderton's Yard, when in comes Lord Mullingham. Harry isn't one that wants for pluck, and besides his monkey was up, so he walks straight over to the Earl, and he says, 'I understand, Lord Mullingham, that you had a dinner of thirty covers at the Castle the very night that you put me off with the excuse that Lady Mullingham was ill?' Lord Mullingham—you know what he's like, two yards of pump water with cold blue eyes and a tired look—he just looks Harry over and he says, 'Yes, that is quite true.' 'Then may I ask what's the meaning of it?' Harry blusters. 'Better not,' says my lord in his gentle voice. 'But I insist on having an explanation,' Harry shouts. 'And you shall,' says my lord in the same tired way. 'I don't very often interfere with my wife's doings, but her ladyship is still very young, and when she makes such a mistake as to ask *you* to dinner, I have to get her out of it the best way I can.'

"For a minute," John Strode went on, "I thought Harry was going for him. The veins stood out on his temples like cords, and his face went a deep dull purple."

"'Perhaps your lordship will change your tune one of these days,' he said at last. 'Harry de Kloof isn't the most insignificant person in the world, though you seem to think so now. Mark my words, my Lord Mullingham, the day will come when you will wish you had never written me that letter, and——'

"'And till then,' said the Earl, yawning, 'we will not renew this very tiresome conversation.' He turned away then," John Strode continued, "exactly as if Harry was so much dirt under his feet. As for Harry, he was well-nigh speechless with fury. When he did find his tongue again, he said very little. 'I'll be even with him before a week has gone over our heads,' he ground out between his teeth, and never mentioned the matter again till nearly a fortnight had gone by. Then he came to me one day and said, 'John, old fellow, I'm in the thick of a shindy with the Right Honourable the Earl of Mullingham, and I've got to meet him at old Willoughby's office to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock. I don't want to take my own lawyer, my town man, and I don't want to employ a local solicitor on a money-lending business, and I don't

want to go alone. Will you go with me and see me through it?’

“I promised to do that, of course; and then he told me that, by way of taking revenge, he had simply sold Lady Mullingham’s jewels to a London jeweller, and that he had taken means to let the Earl have a hint of it, and that it turned out several of the ornaments were heirlooms (as Harry had suspected all along) and would have to be bought back again at any price. Well, the next day we met the Earl at Mr. Willoughby’s office, and they made it very hot for Harry. The jeweller, who had given fifteen hundred pounds for the things, was there, and he was civil and fair, and said that, under the circumstances, he would give them up without a penny more profit than would cover the cost of his journey from town and back. Old Willoughby told Harry plainly that if Lord Mullingham chose to carry it into court the affair would ruin him in the eyes of all decent-feeling men and women. They called him a cad and a swindler and a Jew cutpurse, and lots of other things; but Harry never budged one inch from his position that he had done no more than he had a perfect right to do. And at last Lord Mullingham wrote a cheque for fifteen hundred and five pounds, and thanked the jeweller very civilly for meeting him in the matter of obtaining the things back. Then old Willoughby got up and pointed to

the door. 'Oblige me,' he said to Harry, 'by leaving my office at once.'

"'Certainly,' said Harry, getting up deliberately. Then he turned and looked at the Earl. 'Fifteen hundred and five pounds, and this old gentleman's fees into the bargain,' he said, with a frightful sneer. 'You had better have let that dinner invitation stand, my lord.'

"Lord Mullingham just looked up in his tired way. 'On the contrary,' he said, in the sweetest tone possible, '*I consider it cheap at the price.*'

"That finished poor old Harry," John Strode went on. "He turned and went out without another word. I never saw him or any one else so crushed. And that is the worst of trying to fight these swells. You never know where you have them. They'd go to the scaffold as cool and quiet as they'd light a cigarette."

"And the story crept out," said Matt.

"Crept out? Lord, yes, and was the social ruin of poor old Harry with the county set," John Strode replied. "I always thought it was rather hard on him, the whole affair. They might just as well have let the dinner invitation stand. You see it cost the Earl fifteen hundred pounds."

"I agree with Lord Mullingham," remarked Matt, in a sharp, dry voice. "It was cheap at the price."

CHAPTER VI.

THE SANCTUARY OF THE PEACEMAKERS.

What a strange world the next one would be if we could each arrange a Heaven of our own!

THE following morning Flo went to service with the rest of the family. They called it going to give thanks. They walked to the little sanctuary, as they called the chapel, which was not more than five minutes' walk from the Abode of Peace.

It was a little gem of a building, unlike any place of worship which Flo had ever seen before. It was of an oblong form, and had small windows at regular intervals all the way round, each furnished with a window-box filled with plants. The windows were all of stained glass, and the one over the altar was much larger, as in a church, and told very beautifully the story of Jacob and Rachel,—not in the usual conventional church-window style, but more like a picture painted upon a great sheet of glass instead of on a canvas.

The pews were very wide, and were fitted with regular stalls on the one side and with wide kneeling-stools and sloping book-rests on the other. The pulpit was a piece of superb carving, and the altar

was decked with a richly brodered purple cloth, and was adorned by many beautiful plants and flowers. To Flo's mind, the mind of a churchwoman, the sanctuary was more suggestive of a drawing-room than of a place of worship, and the service was so very friendly that it seemed as if the assembly had gathered together for a *conversazione* rather than for a ritual. As soon as the organ began to play, however, all present went to their respective seats, and the general behaviour was decorous in the extreme.

The service impressed the girl deeply. It was so gentle and peaceful, the music was of such thrilling sweetness and the prayers were so tender, the sermon so filled full and overflowing with all love and charity. There were no denunciations of sins hurled at the meek faithful who had come in a spirit of love and duty, no vivid pictures of hell or descriptions of the death-bed of the unrepentant. All was gentle and persuasive. "If there be any among you who have not yet found peace," said the preacher, "there is one sure way of finding it. Give it to others, my brothers and sisters, and surely some small portion will rest over, which will take root in your hearts and grow and flourish there exceedingly. Work for others, and some overflow will well back upon yourselves, and it will bring the richest blessings of the God of Peace with it."

It was just then that Florence Milvane happened

to turn her eyes upon her future father- and mother-in-law as they sat side by side at the end of the pew. Mr. Gorman sat still as a statue, with his dark burning eyes resting upon the preacher. His expression was one of complete satisfaction and appreciation. His wife was sitting with her eyes closed, her face paler than ever, and bearing an expression of intensest pain upon it. As the sermon came to an end, Flo saw that a sigh escaped her lips, and she fancied it was a sigh of relief. The thought flashed upon her that Mrs. Gorman was devoured by some secret trouble, and that it was literally eating her heart out. Then her attention was recalled to the old pastor with his gentle voice and silvery hair as he announced hymn No. 48, and then he read the text: "These are they which came out of great tribulation."

Then the pastor's daughter played the first two lines, and they began to sing,—

"These are they which came,
All praise and glory giving,
Through tribulation great,
To seek the waters living.

"These are they to whom
God gave below affliction,
That they might know above
His endless benediction.

THE PEACEMAKERS.

"These are they! God's peace
Their portion is for ever;
A band once scattered now
Nor time nor chance can sever.

"These are they! On earth
Wide, wide apart their races;
Jew, Christian, and Turk,
But God's seal on their faces.

"These are they which wrote
With tears the human story;
God sought them far and wide,
In peace to share His glory."

The hymn was a favourite one with the little congregation, the tune to which it went was sweet and alluring, and the effect upon the stranger was almost magical. There were tears in her eyes as she sank upon her knees for the final blessing.

"The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you and give you peace, now and for evermore. Amen."

In the solemn hush which followed, Florence Milvane determined to turn aside from the colder path in which she had walked all her life and to become in heart and truth a Peacemaker.

Matt's first words when they once more gained the street struck her with the shock of hideous incongruity. "Well," he said, "how did you like it? Queer little show, isn't it?"

"Oh, Matt!" she burst out.

"Eh, what? Why, little girl, you don't mean to say it has been too much for you? You need not go, you know, if you don't feel that way. I'll say that for the Peacemakers, they never urge any one to join them. My father believes in perfect freedom of religious thought. They only want members who feel just as they do."

"Oh, Matt," she cried, "I thought it was beautiful—beautiful."

"Did you? Well, we never can tell how a different form of service will strike others. Then you won't mind going to sanctuary sometimes?"

"I shall always go," she burst out.

"That will please my old father intensely," he said. "We must take an opportunity of telling him."

He did not do so, however, until quite late in the day, after the late supper,—indeed, when Mrs. Gorman and the girls had left the room. Then Matt stayed behind and told his father that Flo had been deeply impressed by the service that day, and had declared her intention of becoming a regular member of the community after her marriage.

Mr. Gorman said little, but an hour later he came into the drawing-room, where the whole party were sitting very happily around the fire, and put an envelope into Flo's hand. "My new little daughter," he said, laying his disengaged hand upon her head,

“my son’s chosen wife, this is my antenuptial present to you, a trifle to buy pretty clothes with. You can look at it afterwards.” And she closed her fingers over the bit of paper in a plain hint that she should not open it until she was alone.

“Oh, thank you so much, Mr. Gorman!” Flo cried, then blushed a deep rosy red. “Are you both quite sure that—that you are satisfied with me?” At which somehow everybody laughed, and Mrs. Gorman put out a tender hand and held hers close in a silence that was eloquence itself. And when she came later to look what the envelope contained she found a cheque for a hundred pounds.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. MATTHEW.

The moon looks to our unassisted vision like a disc of silver; while to the same eyes, by a powerful telescope, it is shown to be pierced by deep fissures and scarred by the eruptions of great volcanoes. So do a bride's views of her husband's relations change after her marriage. She then begins to perceive the fissures in her new world, and to become aware of the scars of old wounds, hitherto hidden from her.

THE three girls got up very early the following morning, that they might give Flo breakfast before she left the Abode; and it was a very gay and happy party which gathered around the table in the morning-room, where Mrs. Gorman had ordered the meal to be served. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Gorman appeared; indeed, both had promised Flo that they would not do so.

And after that last merry meal eaten in the small hours of the morning, Flo saw no more of the Gorman family until a couple of days before her wedding. Matt, of course, she saw constantly, as often indeed as she could spare time to slip away to London.

As soon as she reached the office on the morning of her arrival in London after her brief visit to Mul-

lingham, she sought out her chief and tendered her resignation to him. He pulled a wry face, but told her that under the circumstances he could not raise any objection. "But I would not have let you go for any other reason, Miss Milvane," he added.

She remained at her post until her successor was ready to fill it, and then she spent a pleasant week in getting herself some wedding garments,—among them a dove-gray gown in which to be married, and a gray felt hat with many feathers to wear with it. Her own savings and Mr. Gorman's present she spent very carefully and judiciously, and when her purchases were all made, she went down to her mother's pretty country home that she might spend the few remaining days of her spinsterhood with her.

The details of the wedding do not concern my story. The Gorman family came down from their hotel in London and lunched at the principal hotel in the little town. Then they walked quietly to church, where they met Flo, her mother, and several of her brothers and sisters. The only guest who could in any way be called an outsider was the girl friend with whom Flo had shared rooms for so long a time, and she was in a curiously mixed state, being half-exultant at the brilliance of the marriage and half-resentful of her own loss thereby.

The most important events of our earthly careers,

weddings and burials, take but little time to accomplish, and this wedding, being such a simple affair, was soon over, and Flo was Florence Milvane no longer, but Matthew Gorman's wife.

Surely never did any young bride set out before with happiness so well assured as when Florence Gorman left her mother's pretty cottage on her honeymoon. "I cannot believe that I am *really* your wife, really married," she said, as the train moved away from the station.

But habit, as all the world knows, is second nature, and by the time that Matt and his wife arrived at Mullingham, after a delicious month spent in the sunny South, Flo was quite accustomed to thinking of herself as Mrs. Matthew Gorman, and quite accustomed to the feeling that if she wished for a pretty hat or a new pair of gloves she could indulge herself in such luxuries without a sensation lurking somewhere in the recesses of her heart that she was little short of a criminal.

They arrived at the Abode on the 18th of January, and found that the fatted calf had been killed over and over again in their honour. This time Flo was conducted to the best bedroom, and Mrs. Gorman told her that she hoped she and Matthew would keep it for a long, long time.

"Not that I should wish to suggest that you should stay here always, dear child," she said, "for

half the pleasure of being married is in having a house of your very own and in being mistress of it. You have led a busy life, and you would find time hang very heavily on your hands if you had no home to think of and see to. But choose your house with care, and have any alterations which it may chance to want done before you go into it. And until your house is quite ready for you and you are quite ready for it, remember this is your home."

"Dear Mrs. Gorman, you are too kind," Flo said. "Thank you so much. I—I have no words—I—I am so happy and you are all so good to me. I think I am the very luckiest girl in all the world."

"You really love my boy?" Mrs. Gorman asked, looking at her fixedly.

"I adore Matt," Flo replied instantly.

Mrs. Gorman gave a sigh as of relief. "My dear," she said, gently, "troubles will come,—they come to all. But you and Matthew are starting fair. The greatest trouble that can touch the human heart you will be spared."

"You mean——" said Flo.

"Mother darling, would you go and speak to Dowson a minute?" said Matty at that moment. "She is in your sitting-room."

"Of course I will. Is anything the matter?" Mrs. Gorman asked.

"I don't know. She only told me she wanted to

see you particularly," Matty returned. Then, as her mother left the room, she turned to Flo and said, "Well, my dear, you've got the swagger bedroom this time. I hope you'll be happy and comfortable in it."

"Oh, I shall," replied Flo, smiling.

"You needn't make much of a toilette," Matty went on. "There's nobody coming to dinner to-night. Mother thought you might be tired and glad to be alone. To-morrow and the next day you have to be at home to receive callers, poor thing. They'll come in crowds. To-morrow evening there is a small dinner, and on Tuesday a big dance. After that there are heaps of invitations for all sorts of festivities, for this is the gay time of the year in Mullingham. I hope you've brought some very smart frocks."

"Oh, yes, I have," Flo replied, sitting down opposite to Matty and toasting her feet in the fender, "some tremendously smart frocks. Matt insisted on it."

"Of course, when you were down before it was such a little pop visit that you saw none of our friends, only two or three who go to the sanctuary."

"Then you know lots of people besides the congregation?" Flo remarked.

"Dear, yes, child; we should be badly off for friends if we depended on the Peacemakers for society. I don't suppose," she went on, reflectively,

"that you will care very much about the members of the congregation. We don't."

"Does that mean——"

"We young ones. Oh, father is the boss of the whole show, so he likes it because he does exactly as he pleases. Everybody kow-tows fearfully to father, and he has got used to an atmosphere of deference. But, of course, none of us get any deference, and—oh, well, of course, we go to sanctuary to please father."

"And you are not a real Peacemaker?" said Flo.

"Nearer to a born mischief-maker," returned Matty, with a laugh. "Seriously, though, I think I would rather go to church like other people. However, mother likes to please father, and so we go to sanctuary instead, and put up with the rest of the lot that go there as best we can."

"But you don't believe in it," persisted Flo.

"Just about as much as you believe in all the tenets of your church," answered Matty, with a promptitude which was almost flippant; "in the actual theories, yes, yes, emphatically yes; in the application of them, it is more doubtful."

Flo sighed. "I was so deeply impressed," she said, "so—so much awed. It seemed as if—as if this peace had really found a spot on earth and——"

"I suppose my father has found it," Matty said,

seriously. "And my mother is an angel,—an angel on earth; but for the rest, oh, well, you will see in time,—the same ideas, the same faiths, don't work the same way with everybody. That can never be. Take Matt, now, for instance. He goes straight on his own line, turning neither to right nor left. I don't suppose he ever gives a thought one way or another to the difference between the Peacemakers and the Church of England; possibly he doesn't even know it; I'm sure I don't. And yet Matt is good and straight and true and absolutely unaffected by all the bickerings that go on around us. Take my advice and do the same. I don't often talk religion, but I believe in one thing. Make a bee-line for the Kingdom of Heaven and leave all the highways and byways to take care of themselves. But, my dear, are we not taking a very serious line for our first chat in your new home? for this is your home until you are in one of your very own."

"Well, what are you two talking about?" cried Rachel's gay young voice at the door. "Can I come in? Dear Flo, I'm so sorry to have been out when you came, but I had a singing lesson and I did not want to miss it. Welcome home, dear. I saw Matt downstairs just now, looking very consequential and important. Have you had a good time? I didn't worry you with letters because I didn't want to give you the trouble of answering them."

"Ahem!" said Matty, in a loud voice, betokening unbelief.

Rachel laughed. "Well, I really did have some thought of that. I must tell you, Flo, that I'm a notoriously bad correspondent. All the same, I do hope when I am married that my friends and relations will let me enjoy my honeymoon without worrying to know whether I think Paris gay or Florence fascinating. Oh, I say, Matty, what do you think? I met Mrs. Johnson-Biggs this afternoon, and she asked me how many servants Matt and Flo are going to keep, and whether Flo has any money of her own!"

"What cheek!" said Matty. "What a horrid woman she is! You saw her at sanctuary, Flo; she had a red feather in her bonnet."

"To our left?"

"Yes, and never took her eyes off you. She always piles it on very thick to father, never omits a greeting, though she never greets us when we are alone. She went a bit too far with him one day, all the same, for she began to make a complaint to him about the rudeness of the chief cashier's wife to her,—her husband is one of the managers at the Works,—and father turned sharp round and said, 'Madam, I go from the sanctuary to the Abode of Peace. Spare me the knowledge of any outward strife, I entreat you.' Of course she had to bottle up all

her chagrin as best she might. Horrid creature she is."

"Here's Matt. We'll be off. Ta-ta," and away the two girls went in a whirl.

Matthew Gorman shut the door after them and drew near to the fireside where his wife sat. "Well?" he said.

Flo looked up. "Well, Matt dear," she said, but her face was very grave.

He was quick to note the expression on her face. "What is it? Has anything upset you?"

"Not in the least. They are all kindness itself," she replied. "I am trying to piece things together, that is all, and I am puzzled."

"About what?"

"Everything! Religion—life—work—play—love—everything."

He stooped and drew her into his arms. "Not about love," he said, fondly. "Surely there is nothing in *that* to puzzle you?"

"In your love and mine—no, nothing," she made answer. "In the so-called love of humanity for one another so much, Matt, so much."

"And you have only just begun to find it out?" smiling.

"I think only since I knew what love can be," she answered. "Oh, Matt, Matt, I am so happy myself, I want all the world to be happy too."

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN.

People often confuse homeliness with vulgarity; yet how many men and women there are who have no education, and who are ignorant of conventional manners, who are full of dignity and who fill their appointed place in the world with honour.

As Matty Gorman had predicted, the friends and acquaintances of the family began to assemble for the purpose of visiting the bride soon after three o'clock of the afternoon following the day of her arrival at the Abode.

Early among the callers was Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, who speedily put Flo through her facings.

"You like Mullingham, Mrs. Matthew?" she demanded, almost before she had settled herself on the sofa whereon Flo was sitting.

Flo smiled. "Well, I hardly can say that I know it as yet," she replied. "I think this is a charming house."

"You would do so, of course. I suppose you will soon be moving into a house of your own?"

"Yes, after a little while."

"Have you any idea what part of the town you are likely to choose?"

"Not at all. You see, I don't know one part of the town from another."

"Ah, no, I suppose not. You ought to come near to where we are,—not far from the Works, most convenient houses, and very reasonable in rent. I suppose you intend to keep two servants?"

"I really cannot say," Flo replied. "It will depend upon the size of the house we take." And Flo made a mental vow that, under no circumstances, would she consent to taking any house which would make her a near neighbour of this lady's.

"Are you going to attend sanctuary?" was the next question.

"I think so."

"Oh, you haven't made up your mind yet. Ah, my dear, it is a blessed faith, that of the Peacemakers. A little flock, and perhaps somewhat unconsidered in the eyes of the world, but peace reigns within its borders, and it breathes good-will towards all men. Oh, dear, here's Mrs. Wilson; really, that woman does forget her position entirely."

"Who is she?" Flo enquired. Looking up, she saw a very stout, good-natured-looking woman come bustling in. She was rather loudly dressed, and had a smart blue feather in her bonnet. Flo saw that her mother-in-law went a few steps to meet her, and that she greeted her with much kindness.

"'Ow are you? Cold, ain't it? I came to

see Mrs. Matthew and wish 'er 'ealth and 'appiness."

"Here she is! Flo dear, come and be introduced to Mrs. Wilson. Mrs. Wilson's good husband is one of Mr. Gorman's most trusty lieutenants."

Flo rose at once and crossed the room to where Mrs. Gorman and the stout old lady were still standing. "This is Matthew's wife," said the hostess, putting her hand on Flo's shoulder.

"Peace be with you," said Mrs. Wilson, taking Flo's two hands and pressing them warmly. "Eh, my dear, but you're bonny. And you've got a bonny man of your own. I've known Mr. Matthew ever since 'e was in long clothes; 'e was bonny then and 'e's bonny now, fair inside and out."

"I think so too," said Flo, with a charming smile.

"And well you may. Not but what you're bonny too. I used to think I should like to 'ave a little girl of my own, just such a one as you are. But the Lord was never pleased to send me one, and perhaps it was all for the best,—I might 'ave lost 'er. Nay, I never 'ad chick nor child, so maybe I was all the better able to look after Wilson and see that 'e got 'is meat comfortable."

"Come and sit here by me, Mrs. Wilson," said Mrs. Gorman. "You like a cup of chocolate, don't you? You see Beth hasn't forgotten your tastes."

"Ah, Miss Beth, dear, you're a jewel," the old lady

cried. "Yes, if you'll put it on the little table. I must get my gloves off, and they're new. I put an old pair in my pocket, for I knew I should never struggle into them again."

Flo turned away to the tea-table, which was spread at the side of the room near to the door. "Give me the cake," she said to Rachel. "I must take some myself to that delicious old lady."

"Yes, do," Rachel replied; "she's an old darling."

Bearing the great silver cake-basket which was half-filled with neatly cut wedges of wedding cake with her, Flo went back to where Mrs. Wilson had just divested herself of her second glove. "You'll have some cake, won't you?" she asked.

"Ay, my dear, that I will, and wish you all the luck in the world while I'm eating of it," Mrs. Wilson replied. Then she helped herself to a generous slice without seeming to think it necessary to excuse herself on the score of its size. Flo immediately carried the basket across to Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, to whom Beth had just taken a cup of tea.

"Give that to me," said Matty, in peremptory tones, when Mrs. Johnson-Biggs had helped herself. "There will be shoals of people here presently. I can hear some more in the hall now."

Thus bereft of her office, Flo subsided again on to the sofa beside Mrs. Johnson-Biggs. "Who is she?"

she asked, indicating the stout old lady opposite by a glance.

"Mrs. Wilson? Oh, her husband's the chief engineer at the Works; he began as a common workman and now he has fifteen hundred a year, and his wife visits with Mrs. Gorman. I confess I cannot understand Mrs. Gorman receiving her."

"Mrs. Gorman likes her, I fancy."

"She always seems to do so. They—the Wilsons—always spend Christmas Day here; so strange when one remembers that she was cook at the Deanery once."

"Who, Mrs. Gorman?"

"No, no," in a shocked tone; "Mrs. Wilson. Oh, it isn't scandalmongering, there's no secret about it. 'Me and Wilson,' she always says, 'me and Wilson did our courting in the Deanery kitchen.'"

At this moment Flo rose in response to a summons from her mother-in-law, and went to be presented to several newcomers. After various more or less uninteresting scraps of conversation, she once more found herself beside Mrs. Wilson. "A bit more cake?" she said, smiling.

"I think not, thank you, my dear. I'm not so young as I was, and good as it is, it may sit 'eavy. Ah, 'ere's the Dean's lady."

The lady who came in next was a very dignified person, with high features of aristocratic cast and a

general air of looking down upon the world from a high pinnacle of superiority. She was followed by a very tall old gentleman, thin as a whipping-post, who poked a little in a short-sighted way as he walked, and Flo saw that he wore gaiters and apron. Behind him came a rather haughty-looking girl very much like her mother.

"This is Matthew's wife, Lady Emily," said Mrs. Gorman,—“Lady Emily Maxwell, dear, and the Dean. And Miss Maxwell.”

“Our best wishes to you,” said Lady Emily, taking Flo's hand and speaking in very melodious accents. “We have known your husband a long, long time, and have as much respect for him as for his dear and good father and mother.”

“Oh, thank you,” murmured Flo.

“I should like to have married you to Matt,” said the old Dean, breaking in, “but it was all done so quietly——”

“Oh, I should never have dared to ask you,” Flo exclaimed.

“Tut, tut, I hope we shall be very good friends. I daresay my wife and daughter will absorb your interest soon enough. You see there is no parishing work in the sanctuary. I always tell my friend, Mr. Gorman, that it is a little *religion de luxe*, very well fitted for the rich and temperate few, but not for the workaday world.”

At this point Flo saw old Mrs. Wilson get on to her feet with a valiant effort, for she was very stout, and the settee, on which she had subsided in response to Mrs. Gorman's invitation, was very low and luxurious, and Lady Emily turned from her hostess to greet her. Truth to tell, ever since the origin of Mrs. Wilson had been made known to her and the identity of the Maxwells had been revealed, she had kept a curious eye on the two ladies who had once been mistress and cook, wondering the while how they would greet one another. To her surprise, Lady Emily went forward with outstretched hand. "I thought I should see you here, Polly," she heard her say. "I knew the bride and groom would have *your* wishes for happiness."

"Ah, my lady," the other replied, "you and me knows what married 'appiness is, and if Mr. Matt and 'is dear young wife is 'alf as 'appy as me and you, they'll not ail much, that they won't."

"I'm sure I hope they will. Yes, thank you, dear, I'll have chocolate," turning to Beth, who had approached her with a cup of the fragrant beverage. Then, as the girl moved away, she added in an undertone, "But I never get such chocolate as yours, Polly."

Mrs. Wilson's broad red face beamed with satisfaction, and before she could speak the Dean's daughter came across the room, and, bending down, kissed

her. "Polly darling, I haven't seen you for weeks," she said, sitting down on the arm of the settee. "You've got a new diamond ring, Polly. How Mr. Wilson does spoil you!"

"Why, you see, my lamb, it's all 'e 'as t' do with 'is money. If 'e'd a dear young thing like you, 'e'd 'ave to spend 'is money on bicycles and pretty frocks and such-like, but, not 'aving aught young to spend it on, 'e just lavishes things on 'is old woman."

"He utterly spoils you," said the girl, holding Mrs. Wilson's fat hand so that she could examine her numerous rings. "Polly, what day can I come to tea?"

"The 'ouse is there, my love," Mrs. Wilson replied, "and your welcome's in it, and will be as long as the roof covers me."

"Then say to-morrow, about a quarter-past five. I've something to tell you."

On the opposite side of the room, Flo, who once more found Mrs. Johnson-Biggs beside her, had missed little or nothing of these scraps of conversation. She was startled by the acrid voice of that lady. "I can't think what all these people can be thinking of. There's Muriel Maxwell actually inviting herself to tea with her and—just look at that."

"Now, don't rise, Polly, I entreat you," said the Dean at that instant.

"Nay, but I will rise, sir," said Mrs. Wilson, struggling on to her feet again. "I never could abide them that gives themselves airs when they get on in the world; and no one shall ever say that Mrs. Wilson forgot 'erself so far as to sit still when 'er own old master came special to speak to 'er. Bless me, sir, because Wilson 'as got on in the world and 'as fifteen 'undred a year, I don't forget that I was once cook at the Deanery and was wed therefrom."

"Nor do we, Polly," said the old Dean, laughing outright, "for there has never been such a cook in it since."

"God bless you, sir, I can't 'elp saying I'm glad of it," was the quick reply.

"Yes, yes, my dear, I'm coming," said the Dean in answer to a touch on his elbow from his wife. "Then good-bye, my old friend. It is always a pleasure to see your kind face."

"God bless you, sir," said Mrs. Wilson; "and you too, my dear lady, and my dear lamb, always."

"Don't forget the toffee to-morrow, Polly," said Miss Maxwell, laying her blooming face against the old woman's red one for an instant. "What, you don't know her toffee!" she laughed to Beth as they crossed the room together. "Then let me recommend you to lose no time in coaxing some out of

her. Mrs. Wilson's toffee is a dream, neither more nor less."

"I can't think," remarked Mrs. Johnson-Biggs at this moment in Flo's ear, "what people can be thinking of. The Maxwells mostly look at one so very much de haughty bar that they seem to belong to another world altogether."

Flo was puzzled for a minute or so to think what "de haughty bar" could possibly mean. Then she grasped the good lady's meaning, but did not like to repeat the phrase lest she should seem to be correcting her. "I don't think," she said, gently, "that there seems to be anything of that kind about them. They all seem very fond of Mrs. Wilson, and there is no sham about their relative positions."

"That's very true. I always say to Mr. Johnson-Biggs that I was born just too high. If you are not born with a title, in the purple, so to speak, you do better to have come right out of the gutter. A man who starts with a good grammar-school education has no chance against one that began with fourpence a day as a pit-boy, or as a nipper in works of some kind. It's because education makes people sensitive,—yes, that's it. They haven't the same push in them."

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER THE VENEER.

Human nature is human nature, whether it wears velvet or fustian, or whether it abides in a palace or a hovel.

THE reception days once over, the young couple began to look out for a nest of their own. Flo, being wholly ignorant of Mullingham and its traditions, had but little to say on the question of locality. All that she concerned herself with was that the house should not be too near, or, indeed, at all near to the domicile of Mrs. Johnson-Biggs. "I daresay she is most desirable and good and all that, Matt," she said, "but I have never been used to chumming up with just that kind of woman, and I don't think I could stand her being my intimate friend and neighbour. I think one gets like that when one has been used to keeping office hours,—one somehow never knows the real domesticated sort of person."

"Mrs. Johnson-Biggs is horrid," Matt declared, with the most uncompromising plainness. "My mother tolerates her because her husband is useful—well, almost essential—to my father; none of the girls can stand her at any price. Besides that, I don't want to be anywhere near the Works; I get

enough of them without living near to them, especially as I cycle both ways. I believe it would be best to go a little further out of their way, then we should be near enough to my people and not too near any one we want to get out of the way of."

Eventually they decided upon taking a house about half a mile beyond the Abode. It was a charming place, a pretty two-storied villa with wide eaves and French windows, standing in a large garden. It had a good entrance, a pleasant drawing-room, a charming conservatory, and an exceptionally good staircase. "Even a full-sized tennis-ground," said Matt, in a jubilant tone.

So it soon became known amongst the friends of the Gorman family that Mr. and Mrs. Matthew had taken "The Larches" for three years.

It happened on the day that Flo went to return the call of that excellent lady, Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, that she was by force of circumstances obliged to go alone, as her husband had to run over to another large manufacturing town about twenty miles away. "Get one of the girls to go with you," was his last suggestion before leaving home.

But Flo did not do so. She learned incidentally that the girls had all some engagement on hand, so, as she had made up her mind that Mrs. Johnson-Biggs's visit should be returned that day, she went alone. The lady greeted her with effusion.

"When are you coming to look over No. 6?" she enquired.

"No. 6,—what is No. 6?" asked Flo.

"The house in this road that I was telling you of the other day," Mrs. Johnson-Biggs replied.

"Oh, we have taken a house," cried Flo. "We have taken 'The Larches,' on the Sudbury Road, you know."

"Indeed! Then my well-meant efforts to assist you in your search have been taken for nothing. I had got the key from the owner, and——"

"Oh, dear, I am so sorry," Flo cried, in genuine compunction. "I did not in the least understand that you were going to busy yourself to take any trouble over it. Do forgive me. I quite misunderstood you."

"I never take offence," said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs; "but when my advances are misunderstood, I shrink."

The tone and the manner aroused Flo to a sense of her own rights instantly. "Of course, to take offence about such a thing would be extremely foolish," she said, promptly. "For so many questions have to be taken into consideration in choosing a house. Now, as a matter of fact, I did mention to my husband that you had told me of a house near to yours, but he objected to it because it was too near the Works."

"The young men of the present day are like that,"

said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, sententiously. "Business in business hours, and otherwise dissociate yourself from it as far as possible. However, we must all judge for ourselves. I am a Peacemaker by the spirit as well as the letter, and I wish to be at peace with the whole world. Not but what—as I have often said to Mr. Gorman—the evil of the world creeps in even among our enlightened few, and frets as a moth doth fret a garment."

"I am afraid none of us will find perfect peace in this world," said Flo, beginning to wonder if she could not soon cut her visit short.

"Never—never," said the other, with a portentous shake of the head; "it is a contentious world, and sad is the pity of it. However, we cannot hope to alter it; we can only go each doing our trifle towards the general welfare. But, Mrs. Matthew, this is a *triste* subject of conversation for a young thing like you. Do tell me, are you very gay just now?"

"Fairly so," Flo replied, glad enough to change the subject.

They chatted then amicably on various matters, and Flo noticed that, whatever little failings Mrs. Johnson-Biggs might have, she certainly served the tea with good taste and daintiness; in fact, it was quite a pleasant little meal, and she enjoyed it exceedingly.

"You will come again, often, I hope," said Mrs.

Johnson-Biggs, as Flo took her hand at parting. "We are not rich, but we wish well to all the world. By the way, have you been to see Mrs. Wilson yet?"

"No, not yet. I thought of going there to-morrow," Flo replied.

Mrs. Johnson-Biggs drew herself up with an air of gratified pride which was plain to be seen. "A good soul," she said, in a patronizing tone, "but common,—so common."

"Yet she seems to be a very real peacemaker," said Flo, not, perhaps, without a spice of mischief.

"Yes, yes, a good soul, as I say. Well, good-bye, dear Mrs. Matthew; your visit has been a great pleasure to me."

That evening during dinner Flo happened to mention where she had been during the day, and at once her sisters-in-law began to reproach her for not having waited until they could, one or more of them, have gone to return Mrs. Johnson-Biggs's visit with her. "The idea of your going all by your little self and facing such an ordeal!" Beth cried. "There was no hurry to go there. Any day would have done for her."

"I am glad that Flo lost no time in paying that particular call," put in Mr. Gorman at the moment. "Mrs. Biggs may be a foolish woman and an insincere one, and one it is not incumbent upon Flo to

become in any way intimate with, but William Biggs is one of my right hands at the Works and I could ill spare him, while it would pain me greatly to think that either he or his wife were slighted ever so little at the hands of any of my children."

"I am sure, father," said Beth, with rising colour, "that we always make a point of being especially civil to Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, and it is not always easy, for she is a silly, pretentious, ridiculous woman, with whom, but for her husband, we should never trouble to be on terms of any kind. I, for one, cannot endure her, and I do think it is hard on poor Flo that she should think it necessary to go all alone to brave her airs and graces."

"It has not hurt me," cried Flo, with a laugh. "Let us hope that I may never have anything worse to try me, that's all."

Mrs. Gorman gave her a quick look, as of commendation, but Mr. Gorman glanced rather severely at Beth. "I am afraid, my child," he said, "that my teaching has been in many cases wholly without fruit. It pains me to hear you speak in such a way of one who comes to my house as a friend. It is incompatible with all the tenets of our faith. You should try to cultivate a more genial feeling towards those whom you dislike needlessly. Your reward would be a thousand-fold. And besides that, I greatly dislike to hear wholesale and sweeping judg-

ments, more particularly from the young, those who have not as yet been tried in the fire and who see only the outside of things, and who have not sufficient experience of the deeper side of life to be able to see below the surface. I grant you that Mrs. Biggs has certainly affectations of manner and certain little failings of disposition which she would be better without. But I do know this, that she has had a hard struggle in many ways, that she has been a good and faithful wife to William Biggs, and that is a great set-off to the folly of calling herself Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, with a little dash between the two which is not actually hers by right."

"But if it is not hers by right, she is guilty of a fraud in using it," exclaimed Beth, rather hotly.

"In the strict letter . . . yes, perhaps she is," Mr. Gorman replied. "In actuality the little dash does no one any harm, takes away the right of no one else, and is a foible, nothing more. You should try to look at the good in people, my dear, to live in peace and amity . . . in real amity . . . with all men. Then, and not before, you will have peace, the most precious gift in all the world."

As these words passed the old man's lips, Flo happened to be looking at her mother-in-law. She saw that she opened her mouth eagerly, as if she were going to say something almost against her will; then she closed it resolutely, and helped her-

self to a dish which the footman handed to her at that moment.

Just then Matt, seeing that the hot blood had flushed to Beth's young face, plunged into the conversation. "I suppose she was pleased to see you," he said to Flo, "and civil and all that."

"Oh, very much so," Flo made haste to reply. "She gave me quite a lovely tea, and asked me to come again as often as I liked. And then I went down to the town and . . . I spent some money to my great satisfaction."

"What did you buy?" was the general cry, every one being but too thankful to be got off the subject of Mrs. Johnson-Biggs and the duties of good peacemakers.

"A doll," answered Flo.

"A doll . . . and for whom?" It was Matty who spoke.

"Well, I was going to get some gloves, and I happened to see a poor little child get as bad a knock over as I ever saw in all my life, not to be smashed up altogether, don't you know. I picked her up, and the man who knocked her over drove on without a word."

"The brute!" cried Matt, indignantly. "Who was he? Oh, but of course you would not know. Was she much hurt?"

"She was pretty badly bruised," Flo replied. "I

took her into a chemist's to have her looked to and to see whether it was necessary to take her to a doctor or a hospital. She was badly bruised, but that was all. As he said, these little ones' bones are soft and don't snap as ours might do. The chemist gave her a pick-up, and we soothed her down, and then I took her to a toy-shop near at hand and bought her a big doll, to her immense gratification. I think she would even have rather liked to be knocked down over again."

"Poor little soul," murmured Mrs. Gorman, softly. "Flo dear, I should like to pay for that doll."

"We will look her out and do something for her," put in Mr. Gorman from the other end of the table.

"What I would like to find out is . . . who was the man," said Matt.

"I asked a bystander his name," answered Flo, "but his reply was so very much the reverse of polite that I really cannot repeat it. But he told me his name; it is de Kloof."

"By Jove!" ejaculated Matt, in great astonishment. "You don't say so?"

"Why, do you know him?" Flo cried, surprised at her husband's tone. "I fancied from what the man told me that he was no one belonging to Mullingham. He called him, among other things, a blackmailing Jew from London."

"But don't you remember the story that John

Strode told us about Lady Mullingham's diamonds . . . the first night you ever came here?"

"O—h, *that* man!" Flo exclaimed, enlightened now as to Mr. de Kloof's identity.

"Of course, you did not hear the child's name," said Matt.

"Yes, I did. It was Turner,—Lizzie Turner."

"Turner. Ah! That is scarcely identification enough in Mullingham. There are hundreds of Turners here."

Before they had finished dinner, however, the butler came in and made a confidential communication to Matt; and Matt looked across the table at Flo with a laugh. "I am afraid your sin has already found you out," he said. "One Robert Turner is here and wishes to see me 'particular' for two minutes. You'll excuse me, mother, won't you?"

Mrs. Gorman smiled her assent, and Matt left the table and went out of the room. In a very short time he came back. "I was right," he said, triumphantly. "I guessed it was the child's father come to thank you and to get information if he could. Do you mind coming to speak to him?"

"We will all go," said Mrs. Gorman. "We can come back for our dessert and coffee."

So they all trooped out to the morning-room where William had shown the visitor. He was standing near to the fireplace, a decently dressed

workingman who had evidently been cleaned up for the occasion. As Mr. Gorman entered the room he at once recognised him as one of his own workmen and held out his hand. "My son's wife was telling us about the accident just before you came, Turner," he said, in a sympathetic tone. "I hope the child is no worse."

"Peace be with you, sir," replied the man, respectfully. "My little lass is not much the worse, leastways there are no bones broke; but she's sadly bruised and shook, and I left her mother trying to get her to sleep, and I doubt she had a heavy task in front of her. I'd rather have stayed and helped to get her off, for I always did believe in doing the job first that comes nighest to hand; but my missis, she's like all women, saving your presence, ma'am," with a bow towards Mrs. Gorman, who smiled indulgently. "The little 'un keeps sobbing and crying and calling out the horse is upon her, and that she'll be killed before she can get out of the way, and then my missis she ramps and raves, and nothing will satisfy her but that she must have the man's blood, and I don't know who the feller was, and my neighbours tell me that a man standing by told the lady who he was, and naught will satisfy my missis but that I should clean myself and come along to give her heartfelt thanks and find out who the feller was. I represented that it wasn't exactly seemly to be coming

so late of a night, but she wouldn't even hear me. She says, says she, that the master has a tender heart, and that the family was human beings like ourselves, even if they do eat their dinner at supper-time. I'm sure I hope you'll excuse her, ladies and gentlemen."

"Of course, even if there was anything to excuse, which there certainly is not," said Mrs. Gorman, kindly. "I am sorry, Turner, that the poor little thing is so upset. I only hope it won't cause her any permanent injury. I have a horror of harm to a child's nerves, for one never knows when or where it may stop."

"Thank you kindly, indeed, ma'am," said Turner, gratefully. "Then did Mrs. Matthew hear the gentleman's name?"

"Yes, I did . . ." Flo began, when Mr. Gorman broke in.

"Turner," he said, gently, "cannot you persuade your wife that to forget and forgive is to show the most divine. . . ."

"I'm afraid I can't, sir," Turner replied, promptly. "If I go back without finding out something about it, my missis will give me no peace of my life. You see, sir, she's only human like other women, and when it touches her bairns, she's apt to get tigerish, just as every other woman would. Think, sir, if it was a little child of your own that a feller had ridden

over with no more compassion than you'd give to a dog. How'd you feel yourself, sir?"

Mr. Gorman threw out his hand with an impulsive gesture and opened his mouth as if to speak; then he seemed to change his mind, and his hand fell to his side again. "I have nothing to say to that, Turner," he said, in a strange, strained voice. "Flo, my dear, if you have anything to tell, tell it."

"The name of the . . . the . . . man who knocked down your little child to-day was de Kloof," Flo said to Turner.

"Thank you, ma'am, thank you," he said. "And can you add to your kindness by telling me where he lives?"

Flo looked at her husband.

"Mr. de Kloof," said Matt, "lives at Allingham Towers. He bought the place of Colonel Carstairs some two years ago."

"Thank you, sir, thank you," said Turner. "I'll send over and communicate with Mr. de Kloof to-morrow. I should think if I was to go to Mr. Yarborough it would be the best thing I could do."

Mr. Yarborough was the solicitor to the Works, and like the doctor was supposed to look after the interests of all and sundry connected even in the most remote manner with Mr. Gorman's great business. "I am sure that Mr. Yarborough would ad-

wise you as to your best course," said Matt. "Don't you think so, sir?" appealing to his father.

"Yes, I am sure of it," replied Mr. Gorman, in a stifled tone, as he turned away.

"Then I'll go back and tell my missis," said Turner, with deep satisfaction.

"And you shall take a few sweet things and some fruit with you," said Mrs. Gorman, kindly. "Poor little darling, she may have a bad night, and such things help children to forget."

Before the words had left her mother's lips Beth slipped out of the room, returning with a cardboard box which had once held a pair of smart satin slippers. This was filled to overflowing with fruit and good things such as little folk love, and she put it into the man's hands with a pleasant word such as made the gift doubly sweet.

"I thank you, ladies, with all my heart, and my missis, too. And my little maid will when she's older, even if she doesn't now. As for Mrs. Matthew, we've no words . . . but our hearts is full." He put out his hand as Flo stretched out hers, and shook as warmly as a man of his class ever does shake hands.

"My dear child," said Matt to his wife, as they all went back to the dining-room again, "you have made your reputation with the people at the Works for ever. Mullingham folks are rough and ready,

very independent and sturdy, very rude and brusque at times, but they're all right down at the bottom. Once win them and you win them for good and all. There are no half measures about Mullingham folk, are there, mother?"

"No, nor if you are unlucky enough to win their hatred," replied his mother, smiling.

Mr. Gorman alone seemed to have nothing to say. He sat down in his place and drank his coffee with an abstracted air, and when he had finished it, he looked at his wife and asked her to excuse him.

"What a pity poor Turner did not have sense enough to forego his special scheme of revenge!" exclaimed Beth, as the door closed behind her father. "Father would never have forgotten it, and as the child is not much hurt, it would have paid Turner very much better to have pleased him rather than to have gone for this Mr. de Kloof. How shortsighted most people, and especially working people, always are!"

"*Beth!*" cried Mrs. Gorman, in a shocked voice. "My dear child, I wish you would not let your tongue run away with your wits as you do."

"It's perfectly true, mother," cried Beth, who was a rebellious young soul and never cared to choose her words overwell. "If Turner had had sense enough, he would have at least promised to talk his

missis over to father's way of thinking. He will get little or nothing out of the Jew man."

"All the same," said Flo, speaking very decidedly, "Jews are, as a rule, extremely fond of and good to children."

"In any case your father would much rather that Turner, or any one else he knew, was honest and straight in all and every relation of life," said Mrs. Gorman with dignity. "I am sure that nothing would grieve him and pain him more than to know that his advice was taken from mere mercenary motives."

"Which it very often is," flashed out the irrepressible Beth.

CHAPTER X.

THE DIFFERENCE IN A CHOICE.

Injustice would often pass unnoticed if it were not for the inconsistency which so frequently attends it.

THE following evening, when the Gorman family was assembled at the dinner-table, Mr. Gorman, when he had blessed the food, looked around with a smile of intensest satisfaction. "I have something to tell you all," he said. "I went to see that poor little child to-day, and . . . "

"They've let de Kloof off," muttered Beth, in a quick whisper.

". . . and I am pleased to be able to tell you that Mrs. Turner, poor soul, has agreed that it would be foolish and contentious to take any definite action against this man de Kloof. But I have instructed Mr. Yarborough to write him a temperate letter, pointing out that the child has been severely bruised, and suggesting that he make some compensation for his carelessness."

"What does Yarborough put it at . . . a fiver?" Matt enquired.

"Thereabouts," replied Mr. Gorman.

After this the subject was dismissed, and was apparently forgotten. Matt and Flo were extremely

busy looking to the details of their new house and in trying to keep pace with the many invitations which poured in upon them. It was not until they found themselves settled down at "The Larches," and began to be socially somewhat more quiet, that Flo saw very much more of the little congregation which went by the name of the Peacemakers. On several Sundays she and Matt had gone out into the country to spend the day with old friends of his, and twice they had paid Friday to Monday visits to London in order that they might get certain things not easily obtainable in Mullingham. So it happened that during several weeks they were not seen at the sanctuary, and when, on the first Sunday of their residence at "The Larches," they did make their appearance there, Mrs. Matt found herself the object of considerable attention of a kind which was not altogether pleasant to her.

"I quite thought that you were going to attend sanctuary regularly," remarked Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, as she shook hands at the door.

"So I am," returned Flo, with a smile. "But for several Sundays we have been away from home."

"Oh, I am glad of that. I should not like to see either you or Mr. Matthew falling away from the faith," was the lady's comment. "Are you quite settled in your new house?"

"Quite, thank you," Flo replied; then asked a

few polite questions as to Mrs. Johnson-Biggs's health, wondering the while why the Gormans were so long in coming.

"It was a sweet discourse this morning," said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, who was determined to keep "the bride," as Flo was still called in the Gorman circle, as long as she could. "I thought the dear pastor so true in what he said about not picking holes in our neighbours. The text 'Let brotherly love ensue' was excellently worked out, and must have gone home to a good many hearts this morning. Oh, Miss Rachel, how you did make me jump!" she exclaimed, as tall Rachel came behind her and stood close against her.

"Ah, I believe that was your conscience, Mrs. Johnson-Biggs," Rachel cried. "That sermon went home. I thought you looked like it."

"To some present I have no doubt but that it did, Miss Rachel," was the crushing reply. "For myself, I am thankful to say that my heart is at peace and that I dwell in amity with all men. It would be well if all of us could say as much."

"They can't," cried Rachel, laughing. "Mrs. Wilson alone perhaps excepted. And here she comes. Talk of the . . ."

"My dear Miss Rachel, and you just out of sanctuary!" exclaimed Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, genuinely scandalized by the girl's remark.

Rachel made great eyes of innocence. "Why, dear lady," she cried, "I was only going to say that if you talk of the angels you will hear their wings. You evidently know a much naughtier version of the same saying. Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, I am surprised at you."

"You will have your fun, Miss Rachel," the other returned, holding out her hand; but she moved away in a certain amount of confusion, and the colour had mounted to her very eyes.

"You were rather hard on her, Rachel," said Flo, compassionately.

"Not a bit of it," Rachel replied, sturdily. "I do think Mrs. Johnson-Biggs is the very biggest hypocrite I ever knew in all my life. She a Peacemaker, indeed! . . . Horrid, tittle-tattling, mischief-making cat! that's what she is. I can't endure her. I can't stand her at any price."

Flo laughed. "Oh, well, she might be worse, and she might come much more into your lives than she does. If you had to be very intimate with her and to meet her every day and wherever you went, it would be ever so much more difficult. As it is, she is only an incident, so to speak." She dismissed the subject then in a way that was peculiarly her own, and went on talking about other things, so that Rachel, who was, she had already found out, rather fond of wearing a grievance to death, had no chance

of continuing it. Nothing more was said that day about Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, but without doubt Rachel was ruffled and unlike herself, and once or twice Flo looked at her in wondering enquiry.

"What is amiss with Rachel to-day?" she said to Matty when at last she found herself in her eldest sister-in-law's room.

"Oh, poor Rachel!" laughed Matty. "Things are not going very easily with her these last few days. The redoubtable John Strode is to the front again. He wants an answer, and won't take no for it."

"Rachel couldn't marry a creature like John Strode," cried Flo, indignantly. "Why doesn't your father tell him so, and bring things to a proper end?"

"Because my father thinks Rachel might as well marry John Strode as any one else," answered Matty, promptly. "Tell me, Flo, has it never struck you as rather strange that we girls are all unmarried? Rachel is seventeen,—nearly eighteen, in fact,—and she is the youngest of us all. I am a year older than Matt. I should have been married years and years ago if it had not been for an idea of my father's that he knew better what sort of man I wanted than I did."

"But . . ." cried Flo, indignantly, "what difference can it make to your father? I thought he was so keen on young people pleasing themselves. He

never raised the very smallest objection to our being married. And Matt must have known heaps of girls with money or influence, while I have neither the one nor the other."

"Yes, but you were Matt's choice. How many times did not father impress that upon you both,—upon every one of us?"

"But John Strode is most emphatically *not* Rachel's choice," Flo exclaimed.

"With father that does not count; . . . it is only the men who count," Matty declared. "Oh, I can't explain it all to you . . . you'll find it all out in time." Then there was a moment's silence, after which Matty, with one swift glance at her sister-in-law, burst out as if she was getting something off her mind. "Look here, Flo," she exclaimed, in an odd, breathless kind of way, "when you've got to know us better than you do now, you'll find out what possibly even Matt has never known . . . that it isn't all quite as it seems, this Peacemaking creed of ours; there is very little of peace about it. If we young ones stick to it, it is to please our mother, who is a saint if ever there was one on earth, and in no sense because we wish to curry favour with our father, as is the case with half the people who fill the sanctuary every Sunday that ever is. As for what you may say about my father having accepted you without a word as to your fortune or your influence

. . . that has nothing to do with it. You were Matt's choice. That was enough for him. In the first place, Matt is not the kind of fellow who would brook interference even from his father, though a better and more dutiful son never lived in this world. Still, Matt is a partner in the Works, not a dependant of father's, and he was able to please himself about his marriage, and he did. Again, it is part of father's creed that a man shall marry the girl of his heart, though he never seems to think the same thing at all necessary for his daughters. He would willingly see poor Rachel married to John Strode tomorrow, blatant cad as he is, simply because he is rich, and because he declares that Rachel is the girl of his heart and that he cannot be happy with any other. But he is a man, and men's feelings you know are strong and deep, not like a girl's, which are easily satisfied if only you give them plenty to eat and drink and a warm bed to lie in, as you do for the cats. Girls will love any one . . . hush . . sh . . sh! that's mother coming; not a word to her . . . she can't bear us to criticise father in any way."

They could hear Mrs. Gorman talking to some one in the corridor.

"Tell me, quick," exclaimed Flo, in a breathless whisper . . . "Will she ever give in? Will she ever let herself be persuaded to marry that dreadful man?"

"Never," returned Matty, with emphasis. "Rachel is young, but she is not weak, and she would die first."

"I'm glad of that," murmured Flo, as the door opened and Mrs. Gorman came into the room.

CHAPTER XI.

A THUNDERBOLT.

A bold move is a very fine thing, and often carries the day for sheer want of a bolder move to parry it.

As soon as Matt and Flo were really settled in their new house they gave a dinner-party. It was a very serious affair for Flo, who had never had any say in the giving of a party of any kind in all her life before; but she found in her mother-in-law a great tower of strength, which enabled her to sail through her difficulties without feeling in any way that she was giving up her rights as the mistress of "The Larches." It was Mrs. Gorman who made the final decisions as to the *menu*, who advised Flo what decorations she could have which would be a little out of the common and original. It was Mrs. Gorman who instructed her as to who should take who, and who gave her many most useful hints as to her best plan for making the whole affair go off successfully. And the entertainment was an unqualified success from first to last, and more than one lady said plainly to Mrs. Gorman that for a young wife's first dinner-party everything had gone off wonderfully well.

Of course, at this first and most formal party of the family at the Abode of Peace, only Mr. and Mrs. Gorman had been present. Flo had suggested that at least two of her sisters-in-law should join them, but the girls themselves had promptly vetoed any such arrangement. "My dear," said Matty, who was a young woman gifted with quite her full share of common sense, "whatever you do, don't swamp your first dinner-party with relations. If you ask father and mother, that is all that is necessary. We don't need to be pushed in every time you invite any one else. We'll come to your next one, and then you need not ask the father and mother. To my mind there is nothing so terrible as going to a dinner and finding oneself flanked on either side by belongings of the house. Don't begin it, my dear, and then you will never have to lop off and give offence all round later on."

So only the heads of the family were bidden, and Flo suggested to Matt, when he was congratulating her afterwards, that they might give a little dinner specially for his sisters. "You must know heaps of men, Matt," she said. "I mean bachelors, unattached men who would love to come to a young dinner-party. What do you think?"

"I think it's a splendid idea," he declared. "We'll get the invitations out at once, and don't let on who is coming."

Accordingly the list for this second dinner was kept a profound secret between Matt and his wife, and not even Mrs. Gorman was taken into their confidence. Their party was one of fourteen, but the previous day Matt, when he got home to dinner, said to his wife, . . . "I say, dearest, I don't know what you'll say, but I've taken on myself to ask another man for to-morrow evening."

Flo looked rather dismayed. "Another man, Matt!" she cried. "Why, won't that upset all the table? Hadn't we better try and get another girl?"

"We might do that. There's Mary Broughton. She was at the other dinner with her father, but we could explain the circumstances, and I'm sure she would come."

"At all events, we can ask her," said Flo, who was not one to make a trouble of a small matter. "And who is the man, Matt?"

"A very nice chap, who has just come to Mullingham. He has bought a share in the big steel works over at Ayton. His name is Barty,—Brooke Barty."

"And how long have you known him? I never heard you speak of him before," said Flo, who was by no means dismayed at such a desirable-sounding addition to her party.

"My dear child, I never saw him before to-day. He came with a letter of introduction from a fellow I was at school with, my greatest chum at Harrow,

and, as I wanted to show him instant hospitality, I suggested that he should join us to-morrow. He accepted at once when I told him I could answer for you."

"All right. Then I'll go round the first thing after breakfast to see if Miss Broughton will not help us out of our difficulty."

The result of this arrangement was the dinner of the following evening was one of sixteen instead of seventeen. Flo awaited with some anxiety the advent of the stranger. As soon as he entered the room, she saw that he would prove no drawback to her entertainment. He was a tall young man of seven- or eight-and-twenty years old, fair-haired and fair-skinned, though much tanned and burned by an outdoor life. His voice was pleasant and mellow, his manner quiet and easy, his dress studiously plain. Such a young man, in fact, as Flo had not often known, though she had seen hundreds of his class walking about the West-end of London when she had chanced to find herself in fashionable quarters thereof. He met her with a half apology for his presence. "I do hope, Mrs. Gorman," he said, as she went forward to meet him, "that my coming to-night was not a great bore to you and did not put you out very much. Your husband simply insisted on my coming, and hardly left me any choice."

"And he was quite right," declared Flo, in friendly

tones. "He would have asked you to dine with us under the circumstances unless we had actually been going out; and surely it was fortunate that we happened to have some friends dining with us . . . only young friends; but perhaps you won't mind that," she added, with a smile.

"I have no rooted objection to young people, certainly," he declared promptly. "And very often there are few or no young people at dinners, so that I may call myself very much in luck's way."

Being the greatest stranger, and one to whom she wished to show especial honour, Flo intimated to Matt's new friend that he was to take her into dinner, and she had arranged that Miss Broughton, who had come to her rescue in the matter of numbers, should sit on his other hand. Miss Broughton's cavalier, however, did not give her neighbour very much chance of talking to her, and Flo found that she was obliged to do the most of the task of entertaining him herself. It was towards the middle of the repast that Mr. Barty suddenly put a plain question to her. "Mrs. Gorman," he said, "who is that young lady opposite in the white and yellow dress?"

Flo looked down the table. "Oh, that is one of my sisters-in-law, one of my husband's sisters," she replied.

"Oh, yes . . . and her name is . . . ?"

"She is called Rachel," Flo answered.

"Rachel!" He repeated the name lingeringly, and a new idea came into Flo's mind. She looked at him sharply, indeed, but he was again looking at Rachel, so that she could gather nothing from his face.

But later on in the drawing-room, she carefully abstained from introducing him to Rachel. "If he wants to know her," her thoughts ran, "he shall ask for it." Wherein she showed that she was clearly of opinion that a certain wise man was really wise when he said, "In vain is the snare spread in the sight of any bird." Nor did she have to wait long. Before the men had been ten minutes in the room, Mr. Barty came to her and said, "Mrs. Gorman, won't you introduce me to your sister-in-law?"

"Oh, of course I will; but to which one, for I have four sisters-in-law here to-night," she returned, with deliberate denseness of understanding.

"It is Miss Rachel that I would like to know," he said, quite meekly. So Flo convoyed him across the room and uttered the few words which were necessary to include him among Rachel Gorman's acquaintances for the future. Among her acquaintances, did I say? I might have used a stronger word, for from that moment it was evident to all beholders that for Brooke Barty there was only one woman in the world, and that woman was Rachel Gorman.

"My dear child," said Matt to his wife, when all their guests had gone and they found themselves once more alone, "did you ever see any one so struck all of a heap as Barty was by Rachel to-night? Or was I mistaken?"

"Not the very least in the world, dear boy," Flo cried. "I've just been bursting to know whether you saw it or not. They say that brothers never do see anything of the kind, but it would indeed have been a blind bat of a brother who saw nothing to-night."

"Oh, I saw right enough," said Matt, with a laugh. "And I saw, too, that Miss Rachel herself was anything but averse to the attention Brooke Barty paid her."

"I wonder," said Flo, half hesitatingly, "I wonder, Matt, if . . . if anything . . . I mean if anything serious should come of it, what your father would say?"

"My father . . . why, what should he say? It is nothing to him whether the girls marry one fellow or another, so long as the ones they choose are all right."

For the first time Flo realized that Matt knew nothing of the several minor tragedies which had been enacted during the past few years under the roof of the Abode of Peace. "Matt," she said, breathlessly, "have you never heard, or seen, or

realized that . . . your father has views of his own on the subject of marriage?"

"Of course, but only such as are reasonable and just. He never said one word to interfere in any way with my marriage."

"But with the girls . . . they have not such a free hand as you have always had. Your father wants Rachel to marry John Strode, and he thinks it preposterous that a girl should want to have a voice in the question of her husband."

"Oh, what rubbish . . . who has been stuffing you up with all that?" he exclaimed, contemptuously. "My dear little girl, if that chap who was here to-night wants to marry Rachel, you may depend upon it that my father won't raise any serious objection. He's young and certainly well off, and by all accounts a very good fellow, and the whole matter lies with the two themselves. We needn't bother our heads about it one way or the other."

Flo said no more. She was a girl who in her years of business life had learned to hold her peace, where a more ordinary girl would have argued the question out to the bitter end. She saw that Matt really did not know certain things which had happened in the days that were gone by, and there was a lurking suspicion in her brain that perhaps, after all, Matty had fixed her heart upon some man who was not all that was desirable in the eyes of her father

and mother, and that she had in her disappointment got into a way of putting down extraordinary parental prudence to the influence solely of her father's peculiar creed. She had assuredly herself seen no sign in her father-in-law's manner or conversation that he did not wish for peace to be part and parcel of his daughters's lives as well as of his son's and of his own. In her sensible mind she came to the conclusion that there was a doubt, and she determined to give Mr. Gorman the benefit thereof.

After this Brooke Barty was to be met with everywhere in Mullingham. From the Bishop's Palace to the Deanery, from the small mess of the detachment of infantry, who held the garrison at that time, to the weekly dinner of the cricket club; from the house of the wealthy manufacturer to that of the careless family who lived about a mile out of the town on the remnants of an almost forgotten prosperity, and danced their way through life on what they jokingly called the edge of a razor. Brooke Barty was welcome to each and all as only a really good fellow or a scamp ever can be. And there was very emphatically nothing of the scamp about Brooke Barty.

To the Abode of Peace he went first of all and most of all. With its mistress he quickly ingratiated himself, and he fell into the ways of its master with an alacrity which was as judicious as it was apparently spontaneous.

On the occasion of his first visit he was, it must be owned, not a little startled by Mr. Gorman's form of greeting when they first met . . . "Peace be with you," said Mr. Gorman, with uplifted hand and solemn mien.

"Thank you, sir, very much," said Brooke Barty, promptly. "Fine day, hasn't it been?"

Mr. Gorman came down from the clouds with a start. "Yes, a very fine day for the time of year," he replied. "I hope that you like Mullingham and are satisfied with your new life."

"Yes, it seems as good as any other," Brooke said, quietly. "I won't pretend that I am desperately interested in steel works except as an investment and as a means of passing my life."

"Ah, there you are making a mistake," said Mr. Gorman, becoming the man of the world all in a moment. "A young man ought to be deeply interested in his business no matter what it is. If he is not so he has not found his right vocation."

"That may be so in ordinary cases," returned Brooke, who had no notion of changing his mental attitude because of what any one else had to say on the subject, "but in mine I don't think it is so. I am an all-round mediocre man with no particular gifts one way or another. I am a very good business man, but I could never strike out a line and found a big business for myself. I hate an idle life or to do

what so many other men who are not obliged to work for their bread and butter do,—make a business of sport. So I have settled myself in a line that will keep myself employed and make me a bigger income than I have, and I am very well satisfied, though not in the least enthusiastic.”

“But you have not come straight here as a partner . . . I mean without any experience?” Mr. Gorman asked.

“Oh, dear, no; I went through a regular course at Drifffield’s,” naming a great firm of steel-plate-makers well known all over the world. “I had to make up my mind when I left Haileybury what I would do with my life, and that sort of thing seemed to me as good as anything else. I did not know then,” he added, frankly, “that I should ever be in a position to buy a share in anything.”

“I hope you will do well,” said Mr. Gorman. “I confess though that I should like you to have a little more enthusiasm. But,” shaking his head a little sadly, “it is a quality that is strangely lacking among young men nowadays, and often when it is found it is not appreciated at its true value.”

“Which,” whispered Matty to Rachel, “is one specially meant for you, my dear.”

It was natural enough that Mrs. Gorman should include among the guests invited to her next dinner-party the young man who had come to Mullingham

with a letter of introduction to her only son. "Of course, if you wish to ask him, I have, can have no possible objection," said Mr. Gorman, when she mentioned the subject to him.

"I always like you to know who is coming, Edward," said she.

"Yes, yes, my dear, but it is for you to decide," he said, hastily; "you are the mistress of my house, and it is your right to settle all such questions."

"It is no pleasure for a woman to settle such things by *right*," she said, in a pained voice.

The tall old man drew nearer to his wife, who was flushed and troubled-looking. "My dear," he said, "when I say your right, I mean only to convey that to me your will is law. If you were to wish me to receive a sweep or a man out of the gutter, I would do it with pleasure to give you a moment's happiness, much less a young man of whom we know nothing but good, and whose manners are certainly like his looks, quite charming."

She hesitated before she spoke again. "Edward," she said, "we have daughters. . . . It is well to be prepared for any contingency which may arise."

"Such a contingency could not be disagreeable," he replied, smiling. "If such a thing were to happen that he came to ask me for one of my daughters, I should raise no objection. . . . Why should I?"

"That is all. I wanted you to bear it in mind,"

she said, quietly. Then she went away, closing the door gently behind her; but it was the action of a woman to whom pain either of mind or body is a thing of daily endurance.

The old man stood just where she had left him for quite a long time. Then he sat down in his chair again and stayed there thinking deeply. "Never was man better loved than she loves me," his thoughts ran. . . . "And yet . . . and yet . . . I don't seem ever able to . . ." he rose abruptly and went over to the great carved desk at which he usually sat to write his letters, seating himself heavily in the big library chair which stood before it. There he sat for a minute or so, then, slowly and almost unwillingly, he put his hand in his pocket and drew out a small bunch of keys. Of these he selected one and put it into the key-hole of the centre compartment of the upper part of the desk, opened a little door, which in turn disclosed a small cupboard, at the back of which were three small drawers. Selecting another key with just the same unwilling air, he opened the lower of these small drawers and took therefrom a bundle of letters and a small leather case. The letters were tied with a faded blue ribbon and were but few in number. The edges were torn and crumpled, the ink was brown with age. He did not untie the ribbon, but sat for a few minutes looking at the packet earnestly. Then he slowly put it back

in its hiding-place and took up the leather case. This he opened, disclosing a miniature, painted on ivory, of a very young girl. She was brilliantly beautiful, a little head running over with close clustering dark curls, dark dancing eyes and a sweet rebellious mouth half parted in a smile. He gazed at the picture long and earnestly, a wholly different Edward Gorman to him whom the world of Mullingham knew, and if the truth be owned, feared as much as it respected. "My lost love . . . my lost love," he murmured at last. "Shall we never meet again, I wonder? Or shall we drift to and fro through the endless mazes of eternity, not knowing when we are near one to the other? No, no, it could never be, never! And if we meet what will become of Margaret, that patient one who has lavished all her life's joy upon a heart that died years and years ago? My God . . . my God . . . what a question to answer, what a doubt to come to one! Almost better the extinction of a featureless heaven, a sexless communion with souls to whom one will be wholly indifferent."

Then he gazed at the picture again with longing eyes and a tender smile parting his lips. "Little girl . . . little girl," he said, gently, "they sold you to a fellow who was unworthy of you, who broke your heart and made you old while you were yet a child. . . . Oh, my God!"

He thrust the miniature back into its hiding-place again with what was almost roughness, locked the little drawer, and then the door of the cupboard. And after that he sat for a long, long time just there at the table, resting his head upon his hands. And yet, with the strange inconsistency of his nature, he never for one moment swerved in his idea that his young daughter, Rachel, should in the end marry John Strode, the man whom she openly detested. He insisted . . . or, stay; that is scarcely the right word to use, for in the Abode of Peace Mr. Gorman's lightest word was law, and was invariably carried out as were the laws of the Medes and Persians in olden times . . . he expressed a wish that John Strode should be included among the guests, and Mrs. Gorman sent him an invitation, as a matter of course, without so much as a suggestion that he might be left out for once. It was not, indeed, until she was speaking of the dinner to her eldest daughter that the girls knew that there had been any such invitation given or accepted. "Oh, what a pity!" cried Matty. "Why did you ask him? The party will be quite spoiled for poor Rachel."

"Your father wished it," replied her mother, in a tone which implied that there was nothing more to say upon the subject.

Matty shrugged her shoulders and pursed up her

mouth, but she did not speak. Too well she knew the hopelessness of appeal to her mother when any wish of her father's was in question. And when the evening of the dinner-party came, almost the first to arrive upon the scene was the redoubtable John Strode, who was refulgent with good grooming and seemed to shine like the very sun. You know what I mean, my reader,—that over-grooming which, like over-good manners, is positively offensive. Have you not known the man who seems to spend his life in jumping around offering chairs to people who don't want them? The man who, with the best intentions in the world, seems never able to sit for five minutes in conversation with even the most brilliant and cultivated persons without always keeping a weather eye open in case some lady may chance to come in to whom he may have the felicity of handing a chair, nine times out of ten when she would infinitely rather choose one for herself, more especially when he happens to carry her his own. John Strode's natural manners were not of this order, for he never troubled about chairs or any other small courtesies to ladies unless he had a distinct object to gain by so doing. Then it is true that his attentions became actually pestilential, as laboured as the aspirates of those who have acquired them late in life, and who speak as if they could never manage them unless they were careful to give each its full and separate

value,—a sort of running, settled, and paid account with the letter H.

John Strode came armed with the sinews of war. That is to say, he sent up by William, from whom he learned that Miss Rachel was not yet downstairs, a lovely knot of orchids such as would have made most young ladies half wild with delight. Rachel received them with a glance of contempt and carelessly threw them down on the nearest table. "How dare he send me his things?" she exclaimed, indignantly. "It is positively indecent . . . like paying before he has made his bargain."

Consequently she went down at the last minute, wearing a simple white gown and not carrying a flower of any kind. "Did you not get my flowers?" John Strode demanded, indignantly.

"Oh, yes," she replied, with studied indifference. . . . "I did not care for them. I hate flowers . . . I seldom wear them."

"Would you rather that I sent you diamonds?" he asked, with a very eager look. "Because, if you would . . ."

"I should like nothing that you could send me, Mr. Strode," said Rachel, with fearful distinctness. "Pray don't trouble to send me anything. I should never wear it, no matter what it was."

He glared at her for a moment as if he was trying to gauge the depths of her dislike and distrust.

"Miss Rachel," he said, choking down his wrath, "I am to take you in to dinner."

"Really!" she said, with a sneer. "And did you ask my father to arrange it? I think you must have done so. Otherwise you would have been given somebody of much greater importance than I."

"You are too cruel," he burst out.

"Nay, not half so cruel as you are, for you never give me a moment's peace. I wonder that you are not ashamed to harry me as you do. If I were a man, I would not give a second thought to a girl who loathed me openly as I loathe you. I would say with the old poet, 'If she be not fair for me, what care I how fair she be.'"

"But I intend you to be fair for me one of these days," he declared.

An expression of the most profound disgust flashed across the girl's proud young face. "I suppose that it is foolish to credit you with even the most ordinary fineness of feeling," she said, with a scornful air. And then she turned away as if it was not worth while to consider the question any further.

Meantime Mr. Gorman was just bidding Matt's new friend welcome in his own characteristic fashion. The young man lingered awhile, but at the first opportunity made his way to Rachel's side. "You look very much put out," he said to her with a laugh. "Is anything the matter?"

"Well, in a way, yes; but it is nothing I can tell you about," she replied. A smile broke over her face, and John Strode, who was watching her, seemed suddenly to grow wiser as to the cause of his lady-love's obduracy. His face darkened, and when Mrs. Gorman, passing near them, took the opportunity of introducing the two men, he could barely bring himself to greet his rival civilly.

"What's that fellow to you?" he demanded of Rachel, as they went across the hall into the dining-room.

"What fellow?" she asked, in a chilly tone of non-understanding.

"That new fellow, Barty."

"Nothing at all," she returned, promptly, "unless it is something when one does not loathe a man with all one's heart and soul."

"As you do me . . . eh?"

"Yes," with a defiant glance at him, "as I do you."

He laughed in a disagreeable way and pressed the slim hand resting upon his arm. She deliberately snatched it away with an indignant "Don't do that."

John Strode laughed again. "Flutter and struggle as hard as you like," he said, with a frightful smile, a smile which sent dismay and fear shooting right through her heart, "it will be all one in the end. The bird that flutters longest is often the tamest when her wings are still. I am patient enough, but

there is a time to end all things, and the end of your tether is getting very near."

"How dare you?" she gasped.

He laughed again. "You will understand by and by," he said, with a persistent air of not taking offence.

And Rachel did see. For an hour or so later, when the main part of the dinner was finished, Mr. Gorman asked his guests to charge their glasses, as he had a health which he wished them to drink.

So the servants went round and filled up all the glasses, and Mr. Gorman rose in his place. On every face expectancy and wonder were imprinted, Mrs. Gorman looking as mystified as any one.

"I wish you to join with me in drinking a health," said Mr. Gorman, in his most mellifluous accents, the accents which were most often in requisition in matters connected with the sanctuary. "It is not very long since my only son entered the bonds of holy matrimony, and now I must ask you to join with me in drinking to the future happiness of one of my daughters."

At this the four daughters of the house stared blankly at one another, and Mr. Gorman went on speaking in his sweet, gentle tones. "I beg to announce to you that to-day I have given my consent to an engagement between my friend, John Strode, and my youngest daughter, Rachel. I am sure that

you will join me in wishing the young couple every happiness and prosperity."

For one blank moment of astonishment nobody spoke or attempted to honour the toast which they had just been asked to drink. Then one or two of the older men caught up their glasses and made a movement as if to hold them out towards the couple sitting together at the end of the table. But before a single glass could touch a lip, Rachel Gorman sprang to her feet and held up her hand to secure attention. "I am sorry," she said, in a voice that trembled with rage, "that my father has made a mistake. I am not engaged to Mr. John Strode, and I never shall be. I have already, indeed, some time ago, definitely and positively refused him. I shall never have any other opinion on this matter, and I beg that it may not be referred to in my presence again." Then, without another word, without a look at either her father or at John Strode, she pushed back her chair and walked out of the room. It was Matty who first made a hasty movement as if to follow her, but Mr. Gorman perceiving her, said in a low tone of command which there was no gainsaying, "Sit still. Stay where you are. Rachel and I will settle this matter afterwards."

For a few minutes the silence was profound and painful, in spite of the efforts of several persons to say anything which would cover the awkwardness

of the outbreak. Then Mrs. Gorman summoned up courage to signal to the most important lady present, and immediately all the ladies rose, glad enough to get away. As for Mrs. Gorman, she walked blindly across the hall to the drawing-room, and then she sat down upon the nearest chair and fainted dead away.

CHAPTER XII.

NO ALTERNATIVE.

They say that no mistress is so hard as one who has herself been a servant ; and certain it is that no one is so unsympathetic in affairs of the heart as the hero or heroine of a very romantic love story.

PERHAPS never, since the Abode of Peace had first been built, had so stormy a scene been enacted under its roof as that which followed Mr. Gorman's unlucky announcement concerning his daughter Rachel and John Strode.

"How dared you defy me in my own house and at my own table like that?" he exclaimed, indignantly.

Rachel stood before him like an outraged young goddess. "How dared you make such an arrangement for me?" she demanded in her turn. "You, my father, to whom I ought by right to look for protection and for affection. I have already told you that I will not marry John Strode. I will never, never marry John Strode. You may persecute me, you may turn me out of your house, and I daresay you will . . . but force me into John Strode's arms you never, never shall, not if I have to take my life to prevent it."

"As your father . . ." he began, but Rachel interrupted him.

"As my father you have a right to my obedience on all minor points. To say what I shall spend, to demand that I shall behave in a certain way, that I shall conform to the rules of your house, and that I shall do nothing which can in any way reflect on your position either as a man or to bring your religion into disrepute. I have done these things. I, like my mother and my sisters, have lived this life of sham in order that I might please you. You cannot say that I have done or said one single thing which could make you ashamed of me. But when you ask, nay, when you try to force me to marry a man whom I know to be a cad, a man whom I dislike and despise to the inmost core of my heart, you are asking the unreasonable thing, and I refuse once for all to obey you. I am your daughter . . . I am not your slave to sell in the open market to what bidder you will."

"I am ashamed to hear you use such a simile," Mr. Gorman cried, trying hard to recover his old tone of calm and quiet command.

"And I," cried the girl, with a great passionate scorn such as seemed to lift her to a height far above that of every other person in the room, "I am ashamed to think that you, my father, should make me feel that such a simile could apply to me. How-

ever, I don't want to say any more about it, only let us clearly understand one another, that under no circumstances could I or would I ever consent to marry John Strode."

Something in the girl's words served to rouse the old man to an almost ungovernable passion. "And I say," he thundered, "that you shall marry John Strode. While my daughters live under my roof in luxury and . . . and . . ."

"And peace?" suggested Rachel, with fine scorn.

"Yes, and peace, they shall do my bidding," he cried, vehemently. "You have torn my most cherished scheme to shreds this day, and you shall yet submit to my will, or"—threateningly—"you shall turn out to die in the gutter."

At this threat Mrs. Gorman uttered a piercing cry, and Matt came forward and caught hold of his sister's hand. "Nay, sir," he said, in accents as soothing as he could make them, "you go too far. If you turn Rachel out, she comes to me."

"What! are you, too, against me?" Mr. Gorman cried, furiously.

"Not against you, sir; or if I am, only in so far as you will wish me to go when you are calmer and more like yourself. You would have my mother to think seriously that you would turn a young girl out into the world . . . her child? The very idea is preposterous. At all events, I am a man of my

word as much as you are, and I say that if Rachel is turned out of her own home she comes to me, no matter what the consequences may happen to be."

At this Rachel turned and literally flung herself into her brother's arms. A word of kindness had melted her as all the threats in the world would never have had power to do, and she broke into such bitter sobs as would have softened the heart of a stone. "Oh, Matt! . . . oh, Matt!" she moaned.

"There . . . there . . . it's all right . . . I'll stand by you," he whispered.

She clung convulsively to him and only the sound of her sobs broke the death-like silence which followed. Mr. Gorman stood before the fire, his eyes blazing, his face dark, his whole person that of one possessed by a great and overwhelming passion. His wife, still weak and trembling from the effects of the fainting fit into which she had fallen in the drawing-room, was lying back in a chair not far from him, evidently trying hard not to give way to a complete collapse. The three elder girls had drawn together and were eyeing their father with apprehension. Flo stood with her hand on the back of her mother-in-law's chair, the very picture of astounded dismay.

At last the old man spoke again. "Well, have you made your choice?" he asked, harshly. Rachel's sobs were her only reply. "Because I will have

your answer at once. You do my bidding or you leave my house."

"No, Edward, no!" cried his wife, pitifully. "Don't say it; oh, don't say it! She is your child, your own child . . . *my* child. Is that nothing to you?"

"I have a right to my daughter's obedience," he replied.

Mrs. Gorman struggled to her feet and went towards her husband. The poor woman was shaking in every limb and her face was as white as chalk. "Edward, I entreat you . . ." she began, when he interrupted her harshly.

"I must beg, Margaret, that you will not give me the pain of refusing you anything," he said, speaking very coldly.

She shrank back as if he had struck her a blow . . . I mean a physical blow, for surely no man can more surely strike a woman in spirit than by wounding her through her children. She sank down in her chair again, her teeth chattering with fear and sorrow, and Mr. Gorman turned and looked at Rachel, still encircled by her brother's arms. "Then I am to understand that you both defy me?" he said.

"If you like to put it in that way, sir," replied Matt, speaking in deferential tones. "I shall certainly not stand quietly by and see one of my sisters, my dear mother's child, forced to marry a man whom she detests and despises. It is incredible to me that

you, a man whom I have regarded hitherto as the very soul of honour, can seriously demand such a preposterous and unnecessary sacrifice. The man is a cad and a brute, and even if she were in love with him I should be sorry to see Rachel or any other girl for whom I had either respect or affection married to such a fellow. He is common, vulgar, grasping, and sordid. As your friend, although we have never been able to understand your liking for him, we have put up with his presence and have treated him with civility. And I must confess that, on my part, it has always been with an effort. I have allowed up to now the fiction to obtain that he comes here for purposes of business. . . . Now, however, that fiction need not be kept up any longer. Mr. John Strode comes here as your friend and for no other reason, but where your liking for him comes in or why it exists is one of those mysteries which I suppose we shall never understand. This is all beside the question, however, and the one which we have to settle now is a more serious one. Do I understand that you really mean to turn Rachel out of your house unless she consents to marry this man?"

"Yes."

"Good. Now we know where we are. You will not expect me to visit you in the future?"

"As you please . . . I have no quarrel with you."

"I shall come to see my mother when I know that

you are not at home . . . that is my duty equally with my right. You clearly understand, sir, that I shall not feel myself in any way bound to hold my tongue on this most distressing subject."

"You can please yourself about that."

"It will seem rather strange to those who do not understand our peculiar form of religion, that you should have turned your young daughter into the street for such a cause,—you, a Peacemaker."

"That is my affair."

"Pardon me, it is my affair also. I would that it were not so. By the bye, the first time I get hold of John Strode I intend to half thrash the life out of him."

The old man made a step towards his son. "I forbid it . . . I insist upon it that there is no open strife between you," he cried.

Matt, however, shook his head. "I am sorry that I cannot oblige you, sir," he said, decidedly. Then, putting Rachel gently away from him, he went quite near to his father. "You have put a new idea into my head," he said, regarding him fixedly. "What is John Strode to you, that you should put him ostentatiously before your own children, that you should for his sake be willing to break your wife's heart?"

For a moment Mr. Gorman did not speak. He seemed like a person fascinated against his will. Yet

nevertheless he did not answer straight to his son's question. "I have given my word. . . . I have sworn . . ."

"To whom?" Matt demanded, sharply.

It was then that the old man shook off the shackles of his son's stronger will and burst into a perfect paroxysm of rage. "How dare you catechise me in this way!" he thundered. "I decline to be arraigned by you or any of my children and dependants. I will have no more of this discussion. When my daughter thinks fit to submit to my will and to ask pardon for her undutiful behaviour she can write to me and perhaps I will forgive her. Until that time I do not wish to be reminded that such a person as Rachel Gorman has any existence. Not another word, I beg. Florence, my dear, I will bid you good-night. I am sorry that you have not been spared such a scene as this." He bent down to kiss her, and she, not in the least realizing what a will of welded steel she had to deal with, put her two slim hands upon his shoulders and held up a persuasive face to his. "Dear Mr. Gorman," she said, "don't be so hard on her. You are making the poor mother so unhappy . . ."

He deliberately drew her two hands down from his shoulders, and, bending, kissed her on both cheeks. "You are going beyond your province, my dear," he said, quietly. "Good-night. . . . Peace with you."

No one but himself knew with what a mighty effort he controlled himself to utter the shibboleth of his self-made creed. The words served to rouse all the fire burning in Rachel's hot heart to flaming point again. "There is no peace in this house," she burst out, indignantly. "It is all letter and no spirit. There is only one real Peacemaker here," pointing to her mother, "and look at her!" Then she turned and walked straight out of the room.

Mr. Gorman did not wait for any further discussion. As soon as the door had closed behind the rebel he followed her and left the room. As soon as the rest of the family realized that he was gone they moved from their several places towards their mother, who, the strain of her husband's presence removed, broke down into smothered weeping.

"Pray, don't fret over it, dear mother," said Matt, with infinite tenderness. "We will take every care of the child, and it is better that she should be with us than in an atmosphere of continual chafe and strife here."

"The Abode of Peace," sobbed Mrs. Gorman, "the Abode of Peace."

"Well, it is rather a mockery," said Matt, drily. "But no more so than most of us have realized for years past. Peace at any price is what we may call the motto of the house and of the Gorman family ;

but it is only to be had at one price. . . . Surely you must have known it all along."

The mother drew herself together with a shuddering sigh. "I . . . I cannot speak against your father, even in the face of this calamity," she said, drying her eyes resolutely. "Perhaps he is right . . . perhaps we are all wrong, and it is Rachel's duty to do what he wishes. You are going to take care of her for me, dear boy. I will try to content myself that it will all work together for good . . . but I think my heart has been broken this night. I think my heart is broken."

"Go to bed, darling," said Matt, in his kindest tones . . . and Matt was extremely fond of his mother. "I suppose Rachel will only take enough things for the night and that the girls will see to her other belongings being sent after her to-morrow. You ought to be in your bed . . . you are worn out with all this fuss and excitement, and no wonder that you are."

He gave a look at Matty and a jerk of his head towards the door, as if to bid her see how long Rachel would be in getting ready to go with him. Matty took the hint, and she and Flo left the room together.

"Isn't it a shame?" said Matty, as they went up the wide stairs in search of Rachel. "Now you see what I mean when I say that peacemaking is not always what it seems. It ought to be a perfect creed,

Flo, and it would be if we could live up to it; as it is, it is a hideous travesty, neither more nor less."

"It is pretty much the same with every other creed that ever I heard of," replied Flo, sensibly. "Most creeds would serve us if we could only live up to them."

"Yes, but this peacemaking has only worked so far because my father has never been thwarted; he has always been considered and petted and made much of till any sign of opposition seems to rouse him to fury."

"But have you often had scenes like this?"

"Never. . . . When my affair was on foot, there was no discussion, no argument. I never dared to utter a single word of protest. I would as soon then have stood up to my father as Rachel did to-night as I would have jumped out of my bedroom window. Indeed, I would rather have chosen the window of the two."

"Then your father's will has always been absolute?"

"Always. I have never seen him as he was to-night. What the effect will be on poor, dear mother, it is impossible to say. Are you here, Rachel? Are you nearly ready, dear? I would only take what you need for the night and the morning. We will see that your things follow you to-morrow."

Rachel looked round defiantly. "Am I doing right to take anything?" she asked, indignantly. "Are not all my things belonging by right to my father?"

"I believe that he cannot by law turn you out into the street wholly destitute of covering," replied Matty, sensibly. "Take what you want, dear. Father will not say anything more. If he does, you can send them back again."

Rachel rose from the small box that she was packing and looked at her sister. "Matty," she said, "you are older than I am and have known father longer. Tell me why he is so fascinated by John Strode as he is?"

"I don't know. We none of us know," Matty replied, shaking her head in a puzzled kind of way. "I suppose there must be some bond, but what it is we have not the very smallest idea. My poor darling, it is hard on you to be turned out as if you were a servant who had been caught stealing, but it is better than staying here in slavery, and slavery your life would be if you did stay. You will be strong, dear, you will be true to yourself whatever happens? Remember, even if you are kept, or rather if we are kept wholly apart from you, that you have always Matt to stand by you, and Matt is a very tower of strength."

"Matt will always stand by you . . . and I,

though it is little that I can do excepting to make your brother's house pleasant and comfortable to you," said Flo, who, if the truth be told, was hard set to keep her tongue within reasonable limits at this juncture.

Tall Rachel bent down and kissed her. "Thank you a thousand times, dear Flo," she said, gratefully. "I shall never forget it. As for you, my dear, dear sister, there is no need of words between us two. You will always be my true friend, I know, and you will look after mother and not let her fret more than you can help. Perhaps, if he thinks of it, father may forbid her to speak to me, and I may not see her again for a long, long time; but I leave her to you, and I know that you'll do your best not to let her dwell too much on this wretched night's business."

Then she went downstairs to the room where she had left her mother. Mrs. Gorman was still sitting, or I should say, half lying in the large chair, and looked like a shattered woman whom a single word might send off into a fit of violent hysterics. Rachel went to her side and knelt down. "Good-bye for a little while, darling mother," she said, softly. "Tell me before I go that you would have me be true to myself, that *you* would not like me to marry such a creature as John Strode."

Mrs. Gorman caught the girl to her heart with a

sudden cry. "Oh, my darling, my darling!" she exclaimed, "did you think that I seemed to be consenting to such a thing, or that I knew anything of what your father had in his mind? No, my love, no, a thousand times no. It would kill me to see it. I would rather see you in your coffin this minute than married to John Strode or such a one as him. Perhaps I ought to have been stronger . . . to have stood up boldly for you as Matt did. But I have always gone with your father . . . it has been the habit of my life to let him decide, and though nothing will ever make me agree with this arrangement, I have not the nerve to go dead against him."

"My poor mother," murmured Rachel, gently. "I understand, I understand."

The poor mother caught the girl to her with a convulsive clasp as she bade her adieu, and then Matt drew her gently away, feeling that it was better for his mother in her half-fainting condition that the agony should be cut as short as possible. So Rachel Gorman went from under the roof of the house which was called the Abode of Peace with no knowledge whether she would ever set foot there again.

As they crossed the threshold of "The Larches," Matt took his sister in his arms and kissed her. "This is a sorry welcome for your first visit to us,

old girl," he said, with rough kindness, "but, at all events, you will be free from John Strode and most of his works as long as you stay here."

"You don't know what a haven of refuge it is, though," returned Rachel, quickly. "I dread to think what might have come if there had been no "Larches" to come to."

"And the very first thing you will have to do is a little housemaid's work," said Flo, trying to make a joke of the unusual circumstance. "For the servants have certainly gone to bed, and we must make up your bed ourselves. Come along, we can air the sheets by my bedroom fire while yours burns up."

And thus it was that on this eventful night there was one more denizen at "The Larches" and one less under the roof of the Abode of Peace.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WAY OUT OF THE DIFFICULTY.

What a wonderful thing love is! How it lights up, smoothes, and beautifies the pathway of life! It is like a torch kindled with fire from heaven.

ALMOST the first person that Matt met when he went to business the following morning was his new friend, Brooke Barty. If the exact truth be told, Brooke Barty was purposely looking out for Matt, and as they grasped hands, he went straight to the point and blurted out just what was in his mind. "Look here, Gorman," he said, speaking in open honest tones, "I daresay you'll think me a meddlesome, prying sort of chap, but I want to ask you a plain question."

"Ask it by all means," said Matt, who had no notion of trying to hush up the truth about the affair of the previous evening, and guessing from Brooke Barty's manner that the question was in some way relating to that matter.

"Well, it's just this. Is your sister engaged to that fellow Strode or not?"

"Certainly not. She would rather die than marry John Strode, and, with the exception of my father,

we would all infinitely rather see her dead than married to him."

"Then what made your father make such an announcement as he did last night? Gorman, believe me, I am not asking this from idle curiosity."

If he had noticed nothing of Barty's unmistakable admiration for Rachel, Matt would have suspected the state of his feelings from his tone and manner. It did not, however, suit him to see too much just then. He was a very wise and long-headed young man, and knew when to shut his eyes as well as most men. "My dear fellow," he said, simply, "you have a perfect right to have an explanation of the barbarous scene that you were let in for last night. And as far as I can explain it to you, I will. Turn back with me if you are not pressed for time . . . no, I'll wheel my bicycle along. I don't bring it so much for getting to the Works as for getting back to my lunch in something like time. As to the affair of last night, I can hardly give you a full explanation, for I don't quite know what it means myself. My father, who is a singularly shrewd man on most points, has what I can only call a craze for this John Strode, whom we all cordially loathe. Strode wants to marry my sister, Rachel, which isn't to be wondered at, and he's the sort of brute who would stick at nothing to get his own way. Most men wouldn't look at a girl who systematically and

openly flouted and scorned them, and I can safely say that I never heard Rachel give John Strode a civil word in my life. However, my father wishes her to marry him; and my father, having been utterly spoiled by my mother, who is a veritable saint, though I do think a mistaken one in that respect, has simply no idea of any one of his children having a will of their own or any desires but his. I foresaw this years ago, and I bargained when I went into partnership with him that in all the affairs of life apart from the Works I should be as free as if I were a perfect stranger coming into the business from a distance. Thankful I have been ever since, I can tell you. With my sisters it was, of course, rather different. They are entirely dependent on him, and he can rule the roast for them in a way which he would never try to do for me. I suppose he thought if he brought matters between Rachel and Strode to a climax by publicly announcing their engagement Rachel wouldn't have pluck enough to assert herself by repudiating it. You saw, however, that she had quite as much pluck as was necessary."

"I did," returned Brooke Barty, whose eyes were blazing. "And did anything happen after we left?"

"There was a right royal row, out of which Rachel came victor to the extent of not giving way one single inch. But my father ordered her out of the house."

"*What!*"

"Yes, it came to that, more's the pity."

"And where is she now?"

"Oh, we took her home with us. Why, man alive, you don't suppose I was going to stand by and see even my own father bully one of my sisters into desperation for such a cause? Not I. I am probably the only person in the world of whom my father stands in a certain amount of awe. If I had had the least inkling of what was likely to happen, I could and would have prevented the whole affair. But it was sprung upon me so unexpectedly that I hadn't a chance of doing more than I did, that was to take her out of the way of persecution."

For a minute or so Brooke Barty did not speak. Then he said, in a curiously strained voice, "I'm glad you did that, old fellow." Then he burst out laughing, as the absurdity of the situation struck him. "I say, Gorman, it's devilish cheeky of me to be calmly patronizing you about your behaviour to your own sister, but the truth is I take a good deal of interest in that sister of yours, and your father's announcement last night was a fearful blow to me, or rather would have been a fearful blow if she hadn't stood up for herself so splendidly as she did. Now you understand why I wanted to know the rights of things."

Matt laughed good-naturedly. "Is that so? Well,

I'm afraid my father won't give you much encouragement as long as John Strode is to the front and while he feels that Rachel ought to give in to him."

"I daresay not. However, my great anxiety is not on the score of your father. Tell me, was he always given to this sort of thing?"

"Not at all. The fact is, some years ago he started a little religion of his own . . . oh, well, before any of us were born, before he was married, in fact; and as nobody ever says nay to him, naturally never at the Works, and as he stands the major part of the expense of his place of worship, equally naturally there also, he has got so accustomed to having his own that he simply cannot stand it when any one belonging to him expresses a different view to his own. It must have struck you as very funny last night that you should be let in for such a scene in a house called the Abode of Peace, at the table of a man who prides himself that his religion is that of a Peacemaker."

"Is that what he calls himself?"

"He does, indeed. My poor little sister launched out, after every one had gone, on the matter of the Peacemakers . . . and, by Jove, she let fly some terrible home-truths while she was about it."

"Did she, though? Then she is not wedded to the sect . . . I suppose you do call it a sect, don't you?"

"Oh, I suppose so. I can't answer for my sisters, but I expect that they have done all along just as I have,—that is, gone to sanctuary and put up with the show solely for the sake of pleasing my father, when left to themselves they would have drifted to church as naturally as they eat their dinner every night. And talking of dinner, by the bye, will you venture on coming out and dining with us one evening? I can promise you there shall be no surprises such as you had last night."

Brooke Barty flushed up eagerly all over his face. "Really, old fellow, you are too kind," he exclaimed. "I shall be delighted to come."

"Then we had better fix a night at once. We shall not be going out anywhere this week. What night will suit you?"

"Any one at all. May I go up and call, and then perhaps Mrs. Matthew will settle it herself? Yes? Then I'll go out this afternoon."

"All right. I'll tell my wife when I go home to lunch that you are coming and that I have asked you to arrange an evening for dining with her."

So the two young men parted, Matt Gorman feeling that he had made a most useful and successful move, and Brooke Barty with the pleasant sensation that he was one stage nearer to the goal of his earthly happiness.

Matt when he reached the Works found that his

father was already there and had been asking for him. He went, therefore, at once to the chief's private office and cheerfully bade him good-morning, exactly as if nothing unusual had occurred the previous evening. "Shut the door. I want to speak to you," said Mr. Gorman, in a constrained voice.

Matt shut the door quietly and sat down on the chair which faced Mr. Gorman's own. There was a moment's silence, then the old man cleared his throat as a preliminary to saying what in truth he found most awkward to say just then. "How is your wife?" he asked at last.

"Quite well, thank you, sir," replied Matt.

"Was she . . . was she——"

"A good deal shaken?" suggested his son, promptly. "Well, yes, sir; I must admit that she was a good deal shaken by what occurred,—a good deal."

"I don't see . . ." the old man began, rather in a flurried kind of way, when Matt blandly interrupted him.

"Well, you see, sir, she had never a suspicion that our particular creed was not all that it seems to be on the surface, and it came with rather a shock when she found that its tenets only hold good when they happen to fit in with your wishes. You mustn't blame her, sir."

"I'm not blaming her," said Mr. Gorman, testily. "All this is quite beside the question. I suppose

you mean to go on backing up Rachel in her disgraceful attitude against me?"

Matt sat well back in his chair and looked steadily at his father. "So long as you are trying to drive her into a marriage which would be equally a disgrace to her and to me," he said, deliberately, "yes, sir, I do intend to back her up."

"And to harbour her?" the old man suddenly snapped out.

"If you like to put it so, sir," returned Matt, calmly.

"Your mother thinks with me," Mr. Gorman began, but Matt broke in more sharply than he had yet spoken.

"My mother has grown so accustomed to going with you, and her love and duty to you have become such a religion with her, that she cannot now bring herself to go dead against you in anything," he said, quietly. "But it is useless to tell me that she would *like* a child of hers to marry a blatant cad like John Strode."

"She is broken-hearted."

"Not at the fact that Rachel refuses to listen to John Strode," cried Matt, quickly. "Don't tell me that, sir. Broken-hearted, perhaps, to see her own child, her youngest, the baby, turned out like a thief into the street."

"She turned herself out," Mr. Gorman cried.

"Pardon me, sir, it was you who first suggested such an alternative, and it was then that I stepped in and bade her come with me ; and I would do it again to-morrow. And I would do it if my mother and you and my three sisters were all against me in opinion."

"I have a right to give my daughters to whom I will."

"No, sir, that you have not. You have no right to force any man or woman into a marriage which is distasteful to them. And I must say that it passes my comprehension why you should wish to sacrifice your own young daughter, your own flesh and blood, to a fellow who is, who can be, nothing to you."

"You mistake. John Strode is something to me," the old man cried. "And, moreover, I have given him my word and I cannot go back from it. I have never broken my word in my life, nor do I intend to begin to suit the silly whims and caprices of a girl who does not know her own mind."

"Well, sir, it is no use to argue the point further," said Matt, quietly, "for we shall never agree even were we to talk till doomsday. We must agree to differ, but, before we close this very unpleasant discussion, I would like to ask you a question. You spoke just now of my mother being heart broken. Do you happen to know that she fainted dead away after she left the dining-room last night?"

"I did not know it."

"It is a fact, nevertheless. She was a long time coming round, and she was more shattered than even the occasion seemed to warrant. If I were you, sir, if you will allow me to say so without in any way wishing to give you offence, if I were you, sir, I would not press my mother's love too near to breaking point. I think it more than possible you might do so."

"That is a question which I neither can nor will discuss with you," said Mr. Gorman, speaking very stiffly. "We will not enter into the main subject again, if you please. I am to understand that you intend to continue in your defiance of my wishes; therefore, out of business hours, we will see as little of each other as possible."

"Very good, sir. Then I shall take opportunities of visiting my mother when I know that you are not at home." And then Matt rose and went away in just his ordinary manner as if he had been discussing no more important matter with his father than the usual business letters received by almost every post. But from that hour, between the two who had been such good friends in days gone by, there came a chasm which grew wider and wider with every day that went over their heads. From that day Mr. Gorman forewent his customary greetings when he and his son met. Matt always said, "Good-morning,

sir; how is my mother to-day?" in perfectly civil tones, yet tones nevertheless which seemed to say to his father, "Thus far do you come and no further." And, on his side, Mr. Gorman seemed to feel instinctively that his customary mode of address would, at this juncture, be as much out of place as it would be were he to strike his son in the face whenever and wherever they chanced to meet each other. So he always replied to Matt's questions, "Good-morning. Your mother is well," or, "Your mother is not very well to-day." If it was the latter reply, Matt invariably made answer, "I'm sorry to hear that. I'll go in and see her on my way home."

CHAPTER XIV.

ON A LONELY PATH.

In the lives of most women and men there comes a time, sooner or later, when they feel that they are Ishmaels to the rest of the world.

IF society in Mullingham in general, and in the community of the Peacemakers in particular, was very much upset by the trouble at the Abode of Peace, the Gorman family did not know very much about it. Those who had been present at the memorable dinner when Mr. Gorman had announced Rachel's engagement to John Strode naturally talked to each other concerning the extraordinary mistake which the old gentleman had made.

"It seems a queer thing that a man should make a mistake on such a point as that," remarked one old gentleman who had been present to the wife of his bosom.

"Yes; but there was no mistake about Rachel; she was outspoken enough, poor child. Between ourselves, Joe, I don't think that the family knew anything at all about the matter,—not any of them."

"John Strode did," replied Joe, promptly. "I was looking straight at him when the announcement was made, and I saw it on his face as plainly as I ever

saw anything on a human face in my life. He looked as if he had trapped her. There was no mistake about it."

"And yet there was a mistake," said the old lady. "She will never marry John Strode. I wonder if we shall ever hear the upshot of the matter?"

"Of course we shall know after a while whether they are to be married or not. You may hear something when you call."

"I shall call on Thursday," said the lady.

Everybody who had been present at the dinner called at the Abode of Peace on the following Thursday, and a good many also went who had not been present but who had heard a rumour of what had happened. Mrs. Gorman was indisposed, suffering, Matty said, from a severe headache. Mrs. Gorman did suffer from headaches at times, so that there was nothing very unusual in the announcement. The general conduct of the house was very much as usual. Mr. Gorman was not there, but then he hardly ever was present on his wife's "At Home" days.

"And where is Rachel?" asked the lady who had called her husband Joe.

"Rachel is staying with Matt and his wife."

"Oh, is she? I hope she is well."

"Oh, yes, very well, thank you, Mrs. Smithers, extremely well," replied Matty.

Mrs. Matthew came in in the course of the after-

noon, but was not accompanied by Rachel ; Matt himself did not put in an appearance.

So those who had gone to spy out any nakedness in the land and to see what they could see, went away but little the wiser. There was nothing unusual in a young girl paying a visit to her married brother and his young wife, and at all events from Mrs. Gorman's "At Home" day little or nothing was gathered by the friends and acquaintances of the family.

So the days passed by without any material change. Mr. Gorman had not apparently altered his determination that Rachel should be shut out of her home unless she was willing to comply with his commands. The suffering look had settled more completely down upon his wife's face than ever, and when Flo saw her she was more than ever certain that her mother-in-law was the victim of some terrible and secret sorrow, borne in patient and uncomplaining silence. As for the girls, they were one and all very proud. In spite of their buoyant spirits, their charming and unaffected manners, they instinctively shrank from commenting on their father's peculiarities and on their sister's misfortunes. So when some among their friends less delicate in touch than others, would fain have coaxed the truth out of them, they drew back and made it plain to be seen that this was a subject too sacred for even intimate friendship to handle.

So the days went on one after another, until Sunday came round again. Then, of the entire Gorman family, only Mr. Gorman himself occupied the long pew which was arranged to hold eight persons.

"You will go to sanctuary this morning, Matty," said Mrs. Gorman.

"Not this morning, mother," Matty replied.

"I am not fit to go," said Mrs. Gorman, passing her hand across her eyes.

"No, of course you are not, and I shall stay with you. Oh, here is father."

Mr. Gorman came into the well-shaded room with quiet footsteps.

"Are you suffering, my dear?" he asked.

"Yes, my head is dreadful, Edward; I shall not be able to go to sanctuary this morning."

"No, no; that is not to be thought of for a moment. You should keep quiet; and Matty will stay with you, will you not, Matty?"

"Yes, I will stay with my mother," said Matty.

She had spoken truly when she had said to her sister-in-law that for fear of her very life she would not have dared openly to defy her father as her young sister Rachel had done. But yet the events of the few preceding days had, as it were, endued her with a strength which was not her own,—I mean with a strength that was not natural to her,—and in the face of her mother's suffering she felt that she could have

stood up to him almost as pluckily as Rachel herself could have done.

On his way downstairs he met with his second daughter Polly, who was evidently on her way from the breakfast-room to her bedroom.

"Have you seen your mother this morning?" he enquired.

"No, not this morning, father. I am going to her in a few minutes."

"She is not well," said Mr. Gorman. "Matty is going to stay with her. You will go to sanctuary with me, I suppose, you and Beth?"

"I am not going to sanctuary this morning, father," said Polly. She looked at him straight in the eyes as she spoke.

"May I ask why not?"

"Because I don't feel like it," she replied.

"If you don't feel like it you are better away," he said, speaking very quietly.

It was the wisest course that he could possibly have taken, but he went on his way with the feeling that the scene which had taken place a few evenings before had been the first blow struck at the root of his domestic happiness. He never enquired for Beth, nor did he seek her out; on the contrary, he passed into the library and seated himself in his accustomed place at the table.

For a few moments he sat there leaning his head

upon his hand thinking, thinking deeply, that during all these years that he had been living in an atmosphere of peace, amid surroundings of contentment and ease and luxury, of beneficent affection on the one side and willing obedience on the other, he had been living a life which was a sham. The heart of Edward Gorman was hard within him; so hard and so sorely stricken with what he called to himself the rebelliousness of his children, as he put it in his own thoughts, that he opened his secret cupboard and took out once more the portrait of her who had been his heart's first love,—his heart's only love, if I tell the truth and nothing but the truth. To him she had never changed. There in the miniature, aye, and in his heart, was the same radiant, rich beauty which he had known forty years before; its vivid tints had been undimmed by the hand of time, which had bleached the thick blond tresses of his wife, who lay in pain and sorrow in her room above. There was the same merry light in the eyes, the same dimples about the sweet, smiling mouth. Time had not altered them any more than time had changed the hunger of his heart. His wife, who had borne the heat and burden of the day, she had changed with the years that were gone by, quite as much as he had done. The picture of his first love remained unchanged, gay as a little painted craft which had sailed away upon a summer sea; the wife

who had patiently forded through the rougher and deeper waters of a lifetime was as unlike to the first love as the gaily-painted little craft of a summer's morning is to the boat which has weathered the storms of forty voyages. I suppose it is but human that we should think more of the gaily-painted craft which has seen no service than of the weather-beaten boat which has borne so many lives over troublous waters. Certain is it that Edward Gorman was thinking that Sabbath morning only of the old love who had been his and yet never his, and not at all of the wife who had given her life for his happiness.

"My lost love," he murmured; "it is for you, all for you. I had so schooled myself to a life without you that I believed myself almost contented. But they don't understand me; they don't realize that it is for you; they don't understand that it is for you. So they thwart me, and I bear it, because it is for you—for you only."

Then the little clock before him on the table struck two sharp tiny strokes, which recalled him to himself. He closed the case, laid it reverently back in its hiding-place as in a shrine, and stood up, shaking his shoulders back as if it was with no small effort that he would take up the burden of life once more.

But no troubles seemed to change the regular routine of Edward Gorman's life. That morning

when he seemed to be as suddenly bereft of all his domestic peace and happiness as if an earthquake had demolished his dwelling, he brushed his hat as carefully as was his wont, smoothing it afterwards with a velvet pad as if he were a bridegroom going to his bridal. Then he rang the bell.

"My coat," he said to the man who answered the summons.

The man, anticipating his master's wishes, had brought a light overcoat with him and assisted him to put it on with ready hands.

"Your gloves, sir?" he said.

"Thank you, yes; and my stick."

"I think it is likely for rain, sir," said the man.

"I will take my stick," said Mr. Gorman; "if it rains, you can send the carriage for me."

Then he went out of the house and walked alone to the sanctuary which he had created, the sanctuary against the shadow of a broken heart, that sanctuary which, only that morning, he had believed to be a real place of safety, that sanctuary in which others seemed to find no rest, no peace.

He had been in hopes, or perhaps I use too strong a word, and should say that he had been in some expectation that Matthew, or, at all events, Mrs. Matthew, would not have deserted him that morning. But of those at "The Larches," none went

that day to swell the congregation at the sanctuary. One or two of the older members of the community greeted him with the formula "The Lord's peace be upon you, Mr. Gorman," and received for reply the customary answer, "And upon you also." But none stayed him, as was the common habit of the Peacemakers on Sabbath mornings. He passed to his seat and sat there stern and forbidding, a marked and solitary figure, stiff with pride, forbidding and resolute of purpose.

Nor did the service, which was beautiful, tend to soften his mood. The prayers seemed to be more peace-breathing and tender than usual; the lessons chanced to be two poems, one culled from Ecclesiastes, the other from the gospel of St. Matthew; the hymns were especially favourite ones, and the text consisted of the words, "Peace, be still." I have said before that from the silver-haired old pastor of the sanctuary there came no denunciations of sin or crime. His sermons breathed peace, and this one was more redolent of the virtue of tenderness than many of that small community could remember to have heard in that place before. The hymn with which they ended the service was one which might well have gone home to Edward Gorman's heart, softening it with drops of the blessed oil of charity and love. But, alas! his heart was hardened, hardened as was the heart of Pharaoh in the days

thousands of years ago when he would not let the people of Israel go :

A HYMN OF PEACE.

“Peace in our Borders.”

In childhood's simple days,
Let ours be gentler ways ;
May strife and quarrels cease,
Give us, dear Lord, Thy peace,
Dear Lord ! dear Lord !

In later days, may we
Peaceably live in Thee ;
And for our great reward,
Give us Thy peace, dear Lord,
Dear Lord ! dear Lord !

When age comes creeping on,
And life a victory won ;
Peace over strife our cry,
So win Thy peace on high,
Dear Lord ! dear Lord.

Until the last of the congregation had passed out of the sanctuary Mr. Gorman did not move from his seat. He did not remain longer upon his knees than was usual with him, but he sat with folded arms, looking with burning eyes straight at the altar, with its array of pure white flowers, apparently oblivious to the fact that more than one would have spoken to him as they passed had he but turned his head. Then he stood upright and walked slowly and solemnly down the broad, softly carpeted aisle.

"My dear Mr. Gorman," said a voice,—a voice which, alas! he knew too well, the voice of Mrs. Johnson-Biggs,—“my dear Mr. Gorman, I hope that there is nothing wrong at the Abode of Peace?”

Mrs. Johnson-Biggs had not, I need hardly say, been present at the memorable dinner-party; indeed, she had not, up to that time, heard a single word of the extraordinary announcement which had taken place thereat. “My dear Mr. Gorman, I hope that your dear wife is not ill?”

“My wife is indisposed this morning, I thank you,” said Mr. Gorman, taking off his hat with a flourish. “May the Lord’s peace be with you!”

“I thank you, Mr. Gorman; I feel that it is so. May it rest on you also, and upon yours,” was her glib reply.

“Is it too much to enquire what is amiss with your dear lady?”

“My wife is suffering from a neuralgic headache,” said Mr. Gorman, in dangerously mild accents. I say dangerously mild, because he had no idea that his interlocutor was in total ignorance of the events which had transpired lately under his roof, and he was disposed to treat her affectionate and solicitous enquiries as inquisitive impertinence rather than neighbourly kindness.

At the term “neuralgic headache” Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, who belonged to that class of persons who set

down all inconvenient disorders under the generic and fashionable term of neuralgia, cast her eyes up to heaven and went off into a paroxysm of sympathetic regret.

"Oh, poor thing!" she exclaimed, in a very loud voice. "Oh, poor, dear thing! How hard it is to think that the demon neuralgia should dare to set its insidious foot within the Abode of Peace itself!"

"My house, madam," said Mr. Gorman, in tones of stiff rebuke, "is as subject to the ills which beset ordinary humanity as any other house."

"It ought not to be, dear Mr. Gorman. If any one should have immunity from the ills to which human nature is prone, it should be your dear and sweet wife. Fond wife, devoted mother, true friend, sincere Peacemaker——"

"Madam," said Mr. Gorman, "I thank you for your good opinion of my wife, but you cannot enlighten me as to her virtues. I will bid you good-morning."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, as she stood staring after the tall figure stalking away down the road, "I meant no offence, I'm sure. Most people are not so touchy when you pay them compliments! Did you hear what he said, Mrs. Smith?" she enquired, turning to the wife of the chief cashier, who had just parted from a friend and was standing with outstretched hand to greet her.

"Lor'! my dear, haven't you heard?"

"Heard? No. What?"

"Why, there has been a most awful rumpus at the Abode of Peace; even an ordinary church family couldn't have quarrelled worse!"

"You don't say so! Well, I never! Do walk back with me and tell me all about it."

And so Mrs. Johnson-Biggs learned for the first time something of the tragedy which had but a few evenings before been enacted under the roof of the Abode of Peace.

CHAPTER XV.

A RAY OF LIGHT.

Do you not know the class of persons who grope continually after light and yet seem never to find it?

FROM the hour that Mrs. Johnson-Biggs had gathered from the chief cashier's wife something of what had passed concerning the desire of Mr. Gorman that his daughter Rachel should marry John Strode, she set herself with great assiduity to ferret out all that there was to be learned on the subject.

"William," she remarked to her good husband, as they sat at their usual Sunday's dinner of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, "from what I hear this morning, Mr. Gorman is in trouble."

"In trouble? Why, what's amiss with him?"

"I don't know what, William; something between young John Strode and Rachel Gorman."

"And enough," said William Biggs, gently patting a neat little mound of mashed potato on to a heap of beef and pudding,— "and enough to make such a man as Mr. Gorman sit down and give up trying any more."

"And for why?"

"Because John Strode is a blackguard."

"But, my dear William, it is just the other way about. He wants her to marry John Strode, and she won't look at him."

Mr. William Biggs was deftly preparing another fork-load for transmission to his mouth, when he stopped and gazed at his wife with absolute bewilderment.

"Jane, my dear," he remarked, after staring at her for a minute or two, "you've got hold of the wrong pig by the ear."

"That's the story as it was told to me."

"Rubbish! Fiddle! Blither! Edward Gorman has got over-much sense to want to tie his girl to one of that breed. Tell me another."

"I only tell you the tale as it was told to me. At all events, Mrs. Gorman is laid up with a neuralgic headache, which may mean anything or nothing."

"Yes, I know," he said, winking his eye laboriously. "When a lady has been titivating the colour of her hair it means a neuralgic headache, and when she has got a hard day's mending on, *that* means a neuralgic headache, too. Well——"

"Well, anyway, Mrs. Gorman has got a neuralgic headache, and not one of the girls was in sanctuary, nor Matthew, nor Mrs. Matthew. Rachel is staying at 'The Larches.'"

"Well, my dear, I shall believe that tale when I have better evidence than your word for it. Not

that I doubt your word, Jane, my dear, but I do doubt them that told you."

"Mrs. Smith told me."

"Oh! And how did she hear of it?"

"Well, she says that Mr. Matthew told Smith,—told him all about it."

"That's as it may be. I see a good more of Mr. Matthew than Smith, and he never said a word to me. All I say is, tell me another."

"Well, I shall go and call on Mrs. Matthew to-morrow,—Monday is her day,—and see if I can hear anything."

Accordingly, on the following day Mrs. Johnson-Biggs arrayed herself in her best attire and set off to pay a visit to young Mrs. Matthew at "The Larches."

She found the outward aspect of that pretty house much the same as usual. Being early in the afternoon, nobody else had arrived, not even the sisters of its master. Mrs. Matthew received her in the pretty drawing-room with kind words of welcome, and promptly rang the bell to order tea for her special benefit.

"Such a long way to walk," she said; "I'm sure you must be quite tired. Now, do take that chair near to the fire, it is such a cosy one. Yes; isn't that a dear kitten? Matt gave it to me the other day. I believe he gave a fabulous price for it,—between ourselves,—but he doesn't tell me that. I

have heard that smoke-gray Persians cost a mint of money."

"And I, too," said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, who knew nothing whatever about the price of smoke-gray Persians, or, indeed, of any other fancy cats. "But then, you know, Mrs. Matthew, a cat of any out-of-the-way kind does give a distinction to a house."

Flo laughed outright.

"Well, I suppose it does; but that was not why Matt bought it for me. Ah, here is the tea. Has it stood long enough, Gerrold?"

"Yes, m'm; it is quite ready," said the maid.

"You take cream, Mrs. Johnson-Biggs? Yes? So do I. And now I want you to try this cake; it is extra good. We made it at home. Oh, no, I didn't make it,—no, cooking isn't my forte; I never had the chance nor the time to learn anything of cooking. But still, as regards this cake, I saw the recipe in a lady's paper, and the cook made it. I am so anxious to have a good opinion on it. It cuts nicely, doesn't it?"

Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, having drawn off her gloves, helped herself to the liberal slice of cake which Mrs. Matthew cut, and settled herself down to thoroughly enjoy her tea.

"You were not at sanctuary yesterday morning, Mrs. Matthew?"

"No, we did not go."

"I was afraid that somebody was ill at first," said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs.

"Were you? Why?"

"Because not one of the family, only Mr. Gorman, was there."

"Ah, well, Mrs. Gorman was not very well yesterday; she had one of her dreadful headaches. She does suffer from them, you know."

"Oh, yes, I know that she does."

At that minute the door opened and Brooke Barty was shown into the room. To Mrs. Johnson-Biggs Brooke Barty was a new and unknown quantity. She had never seen him before, and his name was wholly strange to her. She noticed—for very good people, I mean people who profess to be very good, are usually extremely quick to notice the expression of their friends' faces—she noticed that Mrs. Matthew flushed up and greeted him with unusual warmth.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Barty? So pleased to see you. You are nice and early to-day."

"I hope I am not too early," said Brooke Barty, holding her hand,—the hand, mind you, of the woman who was protecting the girl of his heart.

"You are never too early," said Mrs. Matthew, with no attempt at lowering her voice. "May I introduce you to Mrs. Johnson-Biggs? Mr. Brooke Barty."

Mr. Brooke Barty bowed to the lady, and gave an enquiring glance around the room.

"Presently," said Flo, "presently."

At which he laughed, turned a fine rosy red, and Mrs. Johnson-Biggs felt herself out of it.

"I thought as much," her thoughts ran on. "This is what comes of a London miss coming down and snapping up one of our best young men!"

The good lady forgot that the London miss had not come down to Mullingham until she had done so in the character of Matt Gorman's future wife.

Mrs. Matt, all unconscious of the perturbed thoughts of her guest, had turned to the newcomer.

"You'll have a cup of tea? It's quite fresh. Mrs. Johnson-Biggs and I have scarcely tasted our first cups."

"Thank you, yes; I'd like a cup of tea very much," he replied.

"And we've got a new cake," she went on. "Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, you never told me whether you liked our new cake or not."

"It's an excellent cake," said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs.

"I'm sure it is," said Brooke Barty, "if this is it. You didn't make it?"

"No, I didn't make it; I'm not clever enough to make a cake,—I'm only clever enough to enjoy other people's. No, our cook made it. I fished up the receipt out of *Home Notes*, or the *Ladies' Treasury*,

or one of those magazines that I pick up when I go into Mullingham."

And then the door opened and Rachel came in, —Rachel, looking more like a wild violet than ever, with her soft, dusky hair piled at the back of her neatly shaped head, with her dewy eyes and her roguish dimpling smiles. And Rachel said, "Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Johnson-Biggs? I hope you are quite well; and your husband, is he all right? How do you do, Mr. Barty? You are here betimes to-day."

Then the two settled down somewhat apart and talked to each other, discussing the merits of the tea and the new cake, the receipt for which Flo had fished out of *Home Chat*, or the *Ladies' Home*, or the *Babies' Home*, or some useful little family magazine of that order.

To give Brooke Barty a shade more of a chance, Flo drew her chair a few inches nearer to that of Mrs. Johnson-Biggs.

"You told me the last time I came to see you," she said, in her most confidential tones, "that you would give me a receipt for making sponge-cakes. I wonder if it would be too much to ask you to write it down for me? I do so love home-made sponge-cakes."

"No trouble at all, my dear," said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs; and forthwith opening her card-case she

wrote upon the little memorandum form within it that she should not forget the receipt for sponge-cakes for Mrs. Matthew Gorman. "And talking of cakes, Mrs. Matthew, I heard a rumour that there would be another kind of cake wanted before long."

Flo blushed a vivid crimson hue.

"Oh, well, perhaps. Who told you anything about it?"

"Oh, the traditional little bird."

"Dear me, what an inconvenient little creature it is! But—but it won't be wanted yet awhile."

Perhaps Flo's thoughts were running on one kind of cake and the thoughts of Mrs. Johnson-Biggs were running upon another kind; anyway, that lady dropped a small bombshell into that peaceful drawing-room by breathing across the tea-cups, "My husband says Mr. Gorman will never consent to her marrying John Strode!"

At that Flo jumped,—jumped, indeed, with such a start that she spilled her teaspoon and part of her wedge of cake into her lap.

"Oh, how you startled me!" she said. "I—I didn't know you meant that."

"Isn't it true?"

"True? No, there's not a word of truth in it. She wouldn't look at him!"

"Oh, wouldn't she? Well, I'm glad of that. My husband was saying to me only yesterday at dinner,

you know, that it would be a very bad day for her if she did, and that Mr. Gorman would not consent to it for a moment."

"Mr. Gorman has not been asked to consent to it," said Mrs. Matthew, looking very straight at Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, and wondering whether she was not venturing very near to telling a lie by what her words implied. "Besides, he would be a preposterous husband for her, and we all detest him; he is a horrid person!"

"Now, if it was this one?" said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, indicating Brooke Barty with a lift of her eyebrows.

"Hush—sh—sh!" said Flo. "Don't breathe it,—don't speak of it. By and by you will see what you will see."

All at once Mrs. Johnson-Biggs came, or thought that she came, to an entire comprehension of the situation. Have you ever noticed, dear reader, what a blissful sensation it is to most people when they entirely comprehend a situation which hitherto has been a little incomprehensible to them? It is like a haven of rest after a stormy voyage. And after a few hours upon the troublous sea of conjecture, on which the way was wholly unknown to her, it was sweet to this lady to find herself suddenly landed in the harbour of complete confidence and understanding. In the harbour, did I say? I might rather

have called it the dry-dock of perfect friendliness.

Others came and went, but Mrs. Johnson-Biggs and Brooke Barty each paid what might be called a good, long, satisfying visit. And when, at last, the good lady was compelled to tear herself away, she took both Rachel's hands in a parting which was in itself a benediction.

"Good-bye, my dear, and peace be with you; peace of every kind be yours." Then to Brooke Barty she extended a friendly hand. "I am most pleased to have met you, Mr. Barty," she said, with emphatic fervour. "My dear Mrs. Matthew, your house is so delightful, it is difficult to tear oneself away at all."

As Brooke Barty closed the door behind her Rachel and Flo looked at one another. After the look Rachel tossed her head up in the air and turned to the fireplace. Flo twisted the rings on her fingers.

"That is——" she began.

"You needn't tell me," said he, quietly; "I know 'em so well; we've got ever so many of 'em down at the Works; they all called on me, and I've been to tea with nearly all of them. You needn't explain the lady!"

And then they all three burst out laughing, and sat down again as merry a trio as ever a cloud rested upon.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LITTLE BIRD.

There is perhaps nothing in this world so stupid, inaccurate, and meddlesome as the traditional "little bird;" the harm it does is incalculable; the pain it causes beyond all telling. And the little bird never lacks opportunities for doing mischief.

HAVING passed in the course of her curiosity-search through many phases of mind, Mrs. Johnson-Biggs betook herself away from "The Larches" in the direction of her own home. She had reached Matthew Gorman's house in a fever of excitement, little hoping that she would soon be able to satisfy herself as to the true state of affairs. She had successfully unravelled the most promising mare's-nest in taking for granted that Brooke Barty was a special friend of Mrs. Matthew's, who made a point of visiting her at a time when Matthew was safe to be busily employed at the Works. This mare's-nest had fallen to pieces almost before she had put it together, and she had become aware of the very promising flirtation which was fast ripening into a love-affair between Brooke Barty and Rachel Gorman. She felt very happy as she trudged away down the rather muddy road. She felt as if she would like to turn in at the big

gates of the Abode of Peace and carry to Mrs. Gorman the welcome news that whatever her youngest girl might have wished in the way of a sweetheart, she was not breaking her heart about John Strode at that moment. In the warmth of her overflowing friendliness, she felt like "just popping in," as she would herself have phrased it, and saying, "My dear Mrs. Gorman, forgive me. The little bird has told me that there has been some sort of friction in your family on account of John Strode. Don't worry yourself, my dear, don't worry yourself; she's sitting up there at 'The Larches,' flirting away with a young man called Brooke Barty in a way which would do your mother's-heart good to see." Her feelings so far carried her away that she actually stopped at the lodge gates, but at this point her courage gave way somewhat and she changed her mind. Well, after all, it was getting rather late, and William would be home and he would want his tea, and she had promised Sarah that she should go out the minute tea was done, and perhaps it would be just as well if she did not put her finger into that particular pie. So, choking down her friendly desires, she set her face towards home and resolutely pushed thereto.

All the world says that second thoughts are best, and undoubtedly Mrs. Johnson-Biggs's second thoughts that day were distinctly better than her first instincts, both for herself and for the Gorman

family. I have never found from my own experience such facts which will lead me to agree with the old adage; I have never found second thoughts best,—quite the contrary. But still, if all the world says a thing, there must be something in it, or general experience would not have framed the saying. Alas for Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, however, she that day had an opportunity for third and fourth thoughts, and they undid her.

As I said, she turned her steps towards home, and hastened thereto, for she was somewhat late, and she had both William and Sarah to consider.

“I am afraid I am very late, Sarah,” she remarked with pleasing trepidation to the young handmaiden who gave her admittance.

“Oh, no, m’m, only a few minutes,” was the cheerful reply. “Master is in, m’m, and a gentleman with him.”

She heard voices in the large, warmly lighted drawing-room, and went in there instead of going straight upstairs to her bedroom to take off her outdoor garments. To her surprise Mr. Gorman was sitting in the large arm-chair by the fire, and her husband was standing with his elbow on the chimney-piece talking to him.

“Well, then,” said Mr. Gorman, as she pushed the door open, “I can rely on you, William, and I need give no more thought to it.”

"Not the least in the world, sir," said William Biggs. "I quite understand what you want, and I will see that it is carried through."

"And you think I am wise, William?"

"Yes, sir; I think you are very wise. I always did say that you had the soundest head for business I ever saw in my life, and I don't see any need now to change my opinions."

"Oh, here is your wife! How do you do, Mrs. Biggs?"

"Peace be with you," said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, her mind and her heart still full of the piece of news she had gleaned up at "The Larches."

Mr. Gorman sighed. "Thank you, thank you, Mrs. Biggs, thank you, and peace be upon you also."

"You don't look very well, Mr. Gorman."

"I daresay not, madam; I have not been very well."

"And dear Mrs. Gorman, is she better? I trust so."

"My wife is not at all well; she suffers continually with her head."

"Ah, well," said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, "bad though it is, cruel though those neuralgic affections always are, there is one comfort,—that in your house she has peace."

"I don't know," said Mr. Gorman, shortly, "I don't know."

And then, second thoughts having safely carried her over one peril, third thoughts presented themselves to Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, and landed her—well, the story will show later on.

“I did hear,” said she, preening her head and sitting down very carefully on an adjacent chair, while she looked at the old man with much sweetness, which was entirely thrown away upon him, “I did hear—a little bird told me—of troubles that had come into a certain family very near and dear to us.”

“Indeed,” said Mr. Gorman, in somewhat chilly tones.

“I heard that everything was not going on as peaceably, as smoothly, as is wont to be. Dear Mr. Gorman,” she said, edging a little nearer, and allowing herself to go off into a little gush of feeling, “there is no need for anxiety at all; it will be all right in the end.”

“I don’t think I quite understand you,” said Mr. Gorman.

“Girls will be girls,” said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, laying her hand affectionately upon his arm, “and your Rachel is very pretty.”

It was the first time in her life that she had ever presumed to speak of one of Mr. Gorman’s daughters without the prefix to her name.

“My daughter,” said Mr. Gorman, “will, if she chooses to make her own bed, lie upon it. She

knows my wishes, and it is a subject that I—it pains me—I would rather not discuss it.”

“Discuss it! Oh, no, Mr. Gorman; is it likely that I should wish to do so? But I thought that when I had good news to tell you, that it was at once my pleasure and my duty not to keep it from you.”

“Good news?” said Mr. Gorman, bending his shaggy eyebrows upon the lady.

“I have just seen her,” said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, clasping her hands together, “looking so pretty, and sweet, and charming, and occupied in a way that showed that she was not at all inclined to go to extremes in forbidden directions.”

“Speak more plainly, I beg of you,” said Mr. Gorman.

“To speak more plainly,” said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, “is just to say that I think one Mr. Brooke Barty will, before long, be paying you a little visit—a visit of request—you understand me?”

“Perfectly, madam, and I thank you for the information. And now,” with fine courtesy extending his hand from his heart to the lady, “I will bid you good-bye. William, my old friend, good-bye to you, and peace be with you.”

“There,” said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, when the door had closed behind him, “I’ve set his poor old heart at rest. Dear, dear, to think that a beautiful girl

like that should ever set her heart on a creature like John Strode, even if she was only playing at it!"

Meanwhile, it must be confessed that Mr. Gorman had gone down the road in a tearing passion. Not one word, however, did he say on the subject when he reached the Abode of Peace. Mrs. Gorman, looking very white and shattered, made an effort to appear at dinner, but spent the rest of the evening in motionless silence in her accustomed place in the drawing-room. Mr. Gorman retired to the library, where he paced restlessly to and fro, thinking hard. He took out the miniature again that night, and confided most of his troubles thereto, and he wrote a letter to his lawyers, and sat for a long time in the big chair before the table thinking. And I am bound, as a faithful chronicler, to say that of peace in his heart there was none.

The following morning, as soon as he reached the Works, he enquired for his son, and was told that he had been there for about half an hour, and was busy in his own office.

"Say to Mr. Matthew," was his command, "that I wish to speak to him at his earliest convenience."

Accordingly, Matthew, a few minutes later, tapped at the door of his father's sanctum.

"Good-morning, sir. You sent for me?" he remarked.

Mr. Gorman looked up.

"Yes, I sent for you. Good-morning, Matthew." He moved one or two papers in an abstracted kind of way, took out his handkerchief from his breast-pocket, shook out the snowy folds and deposited it in a heap on the table at his left hand. "I—I—I wanted to speak to you," he said.

Matthew shut the door, crossed the room, and took the chair opposite to his father's.

"Well, sir?" he said, in an enquiring tone. "I am at your service."

Mr. Gorman continued to fidget about among the papers on the table.

"I understand," he said, without looking at Matthew, "that the young man Brooke Barty is a frequent visitor at your house."

"Yes," said Matthew, "he is, fairly so."

"And I am also informed," Mr. Gorman went on, "that some sort of an affair is brewing between him and your sister Rachel."

"I don't know about that," said Matthew, folding his arms and leaning back in his chair. "They're on very friendly terms, certainly."

"I am informed," said Mr. Gorman, "that they are on more than friendly terms."

"Well, sir, I don't know who your informant is," said Matthew, "but I have seen nothing between them but such friendship as there might be between any young man and young woman."

"Has he proposed to her?"

"I cannot say; not to my knowledge."

"But he is likely to do so?"

"There you go beyond me, sir. It will be a very good thing for Rachel if he does."

"You think so?"

"Yes, sir, I do think so; I am sure of it. Mr. Barty is young and well-to-do, his looks are everything that can be desired, he is well-born and well-bred, and straight, and wholesome, a gentleman in every sense of the word. My sister will be a lucky girl if he does ask her to marry him."

"And, thinking that, you will put no obstacles in his way?"

"No, sir, I shall put no obstacles in his way, or in the way of any honest and reputable man who wished to marry my sister, if she wishes to marry him."

"Very good. Then my informant was not wrong."

"I don't know, of course, who your informant was,—a busybody and a tale-bearer."

"My informant is a very good woman, with no idea of tale-bearing or mischief-making," said Mr. Gorman, suddenly turning his great bright eyes upon his son. "My informant did not tell me this bit of news as a piece of gossip, by no means, but, having heard a mistaken story of the troubles in our

family, she told me by way of being a comfort to me,—a comfort, save the mark !”

“Oh, it was a lady,” said Matt, very carelessly.

“Yes, it was a lady.”

“Well, sir, of course you must be a law unto yourself, as we all must; but I can hardly understand that, having turned your daughter out of your house and practically washed your hands of her, you could condescend to listen to gossip about her from outsiders. Of course we all have our own ideas of what is right and wrong, and fitting and unfitting; but I am a little surprised, that is all. Have you anything more to ask me?”

“Nothing.”

“How is my mother?”

“She is not very well.”

“I am sorry for that. I will go in and see her on my way back. Then you require nothing more of me just now, sir?”

“Nothing.”

“Very good. Good-morning, sir.”

And Matthew went away, leaving the old gentleman sitting in a blaze of speechless passion by himself.

Of course, when Matthew Gorman went home to lunch, he told his wife and sister what had transpired between himself and his father.

"That was Mrs. Johnson-Biggs. I always said that she was an ill-natured cat!" cried Rachel.

"Nobody else came, excepting Mr. Barty. Oh, yes, they did; but nobody else connected with the Works, I mean," added Flo.

"Besides," Rachel went on, "there is nothing in it. He doesn't care anything about me."

"Oh, no, of course not," said Matt, promptly.

"Did you tell father so?"

"I told him that, so far as I knew, there was nothing in it; and that, as far as I was concerned, I should be very pleased if there was anything in it."

"You shouldn't have said that, Matt; your being pleased has nothing to do with it. I—I—I haven't said that I should be very pleased if—if Mr. Barty . . ." Then she made a dive for her handkerchief, and burst out crying, with her elbows on the table and her handkerchief up to her eyes.

"Well, my dear girl, I didn't say anything that could commit you in any way, or that could commit anybody but myself. I was obliged to say something; and, after all, the whole conversation was sprung upon me. Little thought I, when I was sitting quietly doing my letters, that my father was going to spring this bombshell upon me. I was so taken aback, I had nothing else to say. I thought we had kept our doings here dark enough from everybody."

"Oh, it doesn't matter," cried Rachel, "it doesn't matter a bit. Only I'm so—so afraid—he'll go and say something to Mr. Barty; and, if he does, I shall die of shame; because he has never hinted—he has never hinted—that—that—he cared twopence for me."

"I wouldn't upset myself over that," said Matt; "because the governor isn't at all likely to give me away by writing to Barty, or saying anything to him about it. He'd be too much afraid of helping it on, my dear. And, besides, as to not saying anything——"

But at this point a vigorous nudge from Flo caused him to stop short and finish his sentence in a wholly different manner from what he had intended.

"I say," he said afterwards to his wife, "what did you mean,—why did you try to tweak a piece out of my sleeve when Rachel was crying?"

"Why, I didn't want you to tell her that Brooke Barty had hinted to you about it. She's in that frame of mind, she'd be saying 'No' and all sorts of things. She might even say 'Yes' to the other man."

"To Strode?"

"Yes."

"Nonsense! she's not such a fool as that; don't think it."

"Well, perhaps she isn't; but you let well alone, and don't you let on that Mr. Barty has ever said a word to you. He wouldn't like it, and she wouldn't

like it, and you may depend upon it that I know what I am talking about."

"Oh, you know what you're talking about,—of course you do. But it seems to me a pity that a girl should be fretting her heart out and not knowing what a man may be thinking of her; it seems a pity, when a word or two would set everything straight between them."

"Yes, dear, I know; but the word or two must come from them, from one to the other, don't you see, not from you. When a situation is so strained, a word or two from the wrong person might do all the harm in the world. Let them bring things about between themselves in a natural way; it will be much better so. As for your father, I cannot understand him," she went on, reflectively. "He seems sensible enough on most points,—on most points, Matt."

"Oh, yes, he's sensible enough, but perverse."

"But there's no reason why he should be perverse?"

"No reason that we know of, that's true."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Matt," she said: "I'll run in and see the mother this afternoon, and hear whether there is any news at the Abode. Perhaps I shall be stopped going there, who knows!"

"Nonsense!" was Matt's contemptuous rejoinder. "What ideas you do get into your head, little woman!"

CHAPTER XVII.

PLAIN SPEAKING.

You know the old saying that the cobbler's wife goes the worst shod? How often do we find in the lives of those who profess any particular line very warmly the utter absence of the very quality which is the base of their professions!

ACCORDINGLY, later in the afternoon, Mrs. Matthew took the opportunity of paying a visit to the Abode of Peace. She found Mrs. Gorman somewhat better as regarded her general state, eager and anxious for news of Rachel, but with evidently no knowledge whatever of the information which had reached Mr. Gorman's ears the previous day.

"I have felt so very unwell," she said, half apologetically to Flo, "that I have not been able to come up and see you, my dear. As soon as I am out again I intend to do so. Oh, yes, I am not going to give way and be ill altogether. It is only that things have been a little too much for me latterly. You understand, my dear, don't you? You are sure that Rachel is not fretting,—that she is well and happy. It seems so strange, and it must seem very strange to you, dear Flo, that one of my children should be an exile from home. But I am praying

and hoping that it will pass, that after a time her father will realize that she does know her own mind, and that she must be let to take her own way in such a matter as this."

"Oh, I hope so; I think that it will turn out so, dear mother," said Flo, gently. "By the bye, did you have any visitors yesterday?"

"Yesterday? I think not—no. No, I was prostrated all day yesterday with my head, and the girls were out. They came to see you, did they not?"

"Yes, Matty came. She said Polly and Beth had gone into the town for something."

"Ah, yes, I remember. No, I saw nobody yesterday; there were no visitors here at all."

Evidently Mrs. Gorman knew nothing about the rumour of the little bird, and, after sitting awhile longer, Mrs. Matthew left her with a very tender leave-taking.

On her way through the hall, however, she ran against her father-in-law.

"Ah, it is you," he said. "Peace be with you."

"And with you also," said Flo.

She felt rather a hypocrite as the words passed her lips, for she well knew that in that house there was no peace.

"I am glad to have met you, Flo," said Mr. Gorman; "I wanted to see you. Come into the library with me, I want to ask you a question."

"Certainly, Mr. Gorman."

She followed him into the library, feeling as a young warrior might feel when he first goes into battle. She was very smartly and daintily dressed in a costume of brown cloth with a good deal of sable about it, and she held her hands very tightly twined together in the shelter of her sable muff as she followed the old man into the great dimly-lighted library. He closed the door behind her and turned up the electric light, then walked across to the great fireplace, whither she followed him.

"Flo," he said, "I want to ask you a question. Are you acting loyally by me?"

She looked straight at him with her clear, honest eyes.

"That depends, Mr. Gorman, upon what you call loyalty. If you mean am I doing my duty as your son's wife, giving him my love, my thought, my care, —yes; I can unhesitatingly answer, yes."

"I do not mean in that way at all," he said, shortly. There was a moment's pause; then he opened his mouth with a sort of click, and, turning once more towards her, brought his hand down heavily upon her shoulder. "Are you aiding and abetting my daughter in her rebellion against me?"

"Yes," answered Flo, "I am."

"You do not know my motives for wishing her to marry this man."

"I don't want to know them, Mr. Gorman. The man is odious; he is not fit for a girl to marry,—for that girl to marry. She does not love him; she does not even like him, or respect him, or admire him. I should consider it a sin if I were to be what you consider loyal in such a matter."

"I have a reason," he said, slowly.

"I don't doubt it. I should be sorry to think that you could wish her to marry anybody without a reason."

"I have a good reason."

"I don't think so."

"I know that I have. I have promised her."

"Yes; but you have promised what is not yours to give."

"She is my daughter."

"Yes, true; but not to give in that way."

"At all events, if you cannot help me as you might do to bring her to a more sensible and dutiful frame of mind——"

"That I cannot do," said Flo.

"No, I accept your decision in that respect; I do not any longer ask for it; but you can do something else for me,—you can aid me in another way."

"In what way, Mr. Gorman?" asked Flo.

"You can at least promise me that you will not place any serious obstacles in the way of Rachel's one day coming round to my way of thinking."

She stood eying him apprehensively. "You mean——"

"I mean that so long as there is a fair field——"

"For John Strode?"

"For John Strode."

"You mean that I am not to ask, that Matthew is not to ask, any other man who might wish to marry Rachel to our house. That is impossible, Mr. Gorman. I neither could nor would dictate to my husband whom he should invite under his own roof. You would not expect Mrs. Gorman to do so here."

"You might at least discourage——" he suggested.

"Mr. Gorman," said she, speaking very quietly, and yet with a flash in her eyes such as warned him that he was treading on dangerous ground, "I don't like to say what is in my mind."

"I beg that you will."

"Would you counsel me seriously to go against my husband in the spirit while keeping with him in the letter?"

"You take too literal a view," he said, with a flourish of his hand which might convey little or much.

"I don't think that one can take too literal a view of such a matter," said Flo.

"Tell me—this fellow Barty——"

"I can tell you nothing about Mr. Barty except what you already know."

"But he—he comes to you?"

"Yes, he comes to us."

"And he and Rachel——"

"I can tell you nothing," said Mrs. Matthew, very sharply.

"Remember," said the old man, "I have sworn that she shall marry John Strode."

"I am not likely to forget it; I wish that I could," said the girl, with spirit. "And if that is all that you have to say to me, Mr. Gorman, I will bid you good-day, because it is time that I was getting home. Matthew will be anxious about me. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," he said, "and the Lord's peace be with you."

"Mr. Gorman," said Flo, "it is easy to send peace with me, but not while you are determined to marry Rachel to John Strode."

Mr. Gorman turned away to the fire.

"We will discuss the subject no further, if you please."

"Very well. Good-night, Mr. Gorman," said Flo.

She went quickly out of the handsome library, hurrying across the spacious hall, and out of the house. In truth, she did not want Mrs. Gorman or any of the girls to know that her father-in-law had had any private conversation with her. Her state of mind was not a little mixed as she hurried along the well-kept avenue. Relief that she had spoken her mind to her father-in-law was mingled with a fervent

hope that she had not done or said anything which would make the situation more strained for the entire family. Then there was also a good deal of an even warmer feeling, a feeling of disgust, and a sense of shocked pain that he, professing so much and thinking so much of the religious side of life, could deliberately have asked her, a young wife, little more than a bride, a wife whom he knew to be beholden to her husband for everything that made existence fair and lovely to her, to go against him,—to be with him in the letter and to turn her hand against him in the spirit.

The lodge-keeper ran out as she heard her footsteps approaching the gates.

“Good-night, Mrs. Jones,” said Flo, coming back to everyday life with a start, and speaking with her accustomed bright and pleasant manner.

“Good-night, Mrs. Matthew. Peace be with you,” said the woman in reply.

“Thank you,” said Flo. And then, as she was about to pass through the gate, she turned and looked at the woman standing in the warm shaft of light cast through the open door of the lodge. “Mrs. Jones,” she said, “I don’t know that there is much peace in this world. I hope that it lives and rests with you.”

The woman, who was comely and simple-looking, stared at the young lady for a moment, and then her face changed.

"Oh, Mrs. Matthew," she said, "I have my rubs, like other people, but it's best to say nothing and to put a good face on it."

"You can't always put a good face on it," said Flo.

The woman heaved a quick sigh. "Eh, ma'am, but it's early days for you to have found it out!" She spoke involuntarily, as one woman to another, not from the position of the lodge-keeper's wife to the daughter-in-law of the head of the house. Then, with almost a cry, she tried to draw back. "I oughtn't to have said that!" she exclaimed.

Flo put a hand out and touched her on the shoulder. "Nay," she said, "I have not found what you thought. My life, so far, is most happy and blessed; I see no sign of its being otherwise. But I don't find peace in all the world, Mrs. Jones. Don't think anything of what I said; Mrs. Gorman is not very well to-night,—suffering terribly with her head; it has made me sad going in to see her. She will be better to-morrow. Don't think that I said anything to seem dissatisfied; I am the happiest woman in the world."

In her jacket pocket she had a loose half-crown, and she slipped it into the woman's hand, gently closing her fingers over it, and fairly ran into the road. And there she cannoned against her husband.

"Oh, how you frightened me!" she cried.

"My dear child! You shot against me as if you

had been shot out of a catapult! Did they turn you out? What is the matter? What has happened? Has it got to that?"

"Oh, no, Matt. I was talking to the woman at the gate. I was hurrying,—I was late."

He drew her forward to where an electric light illumined the road. It was one of Mr. Gorman's fads that his house and its grounds, and, indeed, I might almost say the boundaries thereof, should be well lighted. "Something has happened," he said, looking at her searchingly; "you are fairly knocked over. What is it?"

"Nothing—nothing. Well, perhaps I shouldn't say that. Well, Matt, I'll tell you." And then she slipped her hand under his arm as they turned towards their own home. "I'll tell you as we go along," she said. "I suppose, if I was wise," she continued, when she got to the end of her story, "I suppose I shouldn't tell you that your father had tried to influence me to work against your wishes; but I've never had a secret from you, and I don't like to begin, even although it's something about your own people."

"Besides," he rejoined, "it is my right to know it. No man could have a more insidious enemy than his own father. I mean, if one's father determined to work against one, there is nobody else who has such a chance of doing one harm. Little woman, I tell

you frankly that I don't know what it all means,—I can't tell you what it all means. There is something that none of us know of or understand. Nothing would make me believe that for sheer love and admiration of himself my father wishes Rachel to marry John Strode. That is beyond the bounds of possibility. John Strode may have a hold over my father, although, mind you, three months ago I should have said that it was absolutely impossible that such a thing could be. We may get to the bottom of it one day, and we may not. Meantime, our course is perfectly clear and plain,—to keep out of the quarrel if we can,—for I hate quarrels; they're unseemly, and they're something worse when they come between father and son. But we must go on our own line as completely and entirely as if we had nobody but ourselves to consider. I'm very glad that you spoke your mind to him, because it will make your path so much easier and so much clearer in the future."

"And you won't tell him that I told you about it."

"No, not unless it should be absolutely necessary."

She walked along silently for a little distance, still clinging tightly to his arm. "Dear boy," she said at last, "what is it that is eating your mother's heart out?"

"My mother? Oh, she is upset, and ill, and worried by all this—this miserable affair. She has never

gone against my father ; it is, as she said the other night, the habit of her life to side with him, and it has become so thorough and so fixed a habit that when she wants to go against him she cannot bring herself to do it."

"Matt," said the girl, gently, "do you know, I begin to see that it is true, that old saying, 'On-lookers see most of the game.' Has it never occurred to you that your mother's heart is breaking? that her heart was slowly breaking when I first came down here to Mullingham before we were married?"

"No. What makes you think so?"

"What? Everything. Your mother is not, with the exception of being knocked over as she is just now, a very delicate woman."

"Oh, no."

"And yet she has the air of constant suffering ; such a strange, bleached, pained air of suffering, the air of bearing something. I saw it before I had been in the house ten minutes ; I have seen it ever since. I suppose you are all so used to it that you look on it as part of her ; but it is unnatural for a woman of her age, who has even tolerable health, to look as she looks. Have you never seen her face light up, her lips part, as if she was going to say something,—something eager, something from her very heart,—and then seen her draw back, take a deep breath, and choke it down, as if—as if she would bear the

pain a little longer? Have you never noticed that?"

"No."

"Ah! Then it is as I say, on-lookers see most of the game. And, Matt, although your sisters are fond of saying that there is only one real Peacemaker in all the house, and that is your mother, I tell you—and I know that I am right—that there never was any woman further from peace of any kind than she is."

They reached the gate of "The Larches" as she ceased speaking, and Matt stood there looking at her by the flickering light of the gas-lamp above it.

"It may be that you are right," he said. "For my part, as I told you before we were married, I never took much interest in Peacemaking, or in any of the show; I conformed to it outwardly purely to please my father and mother. I remember then that you asked me how it worked. It might work, but it doesn't. And if my mother is as unhappy as you think, I verily believe it is the damned Peacemaking that is at the bottom of it all."

And then he opened the gate and held it for her to pass in.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THOUGHTS.

There are no thoughts so bitter as those that go back over the past, holding the events of one's life in review and contrasting the present as it is with the present as it might have been if we had acted differently.

"MATT," said Flo, to her husband, opening the door of his dressing-room that evening, "you won't breathe a word to Mr. Barty of what happened to-day, will you?"

"Well, I don't want to throw my sister at any fellow's head," he replied, diplomatically.

As a matter of fact, Brooke Barty was dining that night at "The Larches." I have said that he went pretty often to Matt Gorman's house. Under ordinary circumstances it is more than likely that the all-important question would have been put to Rachel some days earlier than this, but the peculiar circumstances under which she was visiting her brother served somewhat to make her stand-offish to Brooke Barty, and to make Brooke Barty extremely diffident in his manner towards her. It was natural that the girl should feel a certain amount of shame that her father had thought her of so little importance as to arrange and announce a marriage for her without

her consent, without having consulted her in any way, in the face, actually, of a previous refusal to fall in with such an arrangement. It was equally natural that Brooke Barty should hesitate in treating her quite as he would have been able to do had no such *contretemps* come into her life. I do not say that he ever put it into words, that his mind ever framed the thought; and yet an instinct warned him that he would have to be very careful in his dealings with her lest she should take the natural expression of his real feelings for one of pity. There is probably nothing so proud in all the world as a woman who has been scorned, and perhaps no scorn can be so complete as where a woman is made to feel that her judgment is valueless. Rachel Gorman had not said in so many words that she was the more heart-sick and sore because Brooke Barty had seen that the two men who might be supposed to value her the most of any in the world had thought her opinion of no more value than if she were a bale of cotton goods. So these two, while they were distinctly interested the one in the other, while they were even on the most friendly terms, were yet at arms' length apart.

"Why doesn't he speak out?" was Flo's vexed thought as she watched them across the dinner-table; and almost simultaneously Matthew Gorman found himself thinking,—What a pity Barty hadn't broken

the ice with Rachel before that fatal announcement at his mother's dinner-party. However, it was not possible for any young man to propose to the girl of his heart while seated at the dinner-table in the presence of her brother and his wife, and, as a matter of course, Mrs. Matthew and Rachel left the table that evening without having advanced the situation in the smallest degree.

"What did you do this afternoon?" Flo enquired of her sister-in-law, as they settled themselves before the drawing-room fire.

"Oh, I went to tea with Polly and Beth."

"At Hammond's?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't they come here? They are not obliged to meet their own sister at a confectioner's."

"No, dear, they're not. But you forget this place is being watched: Hammond's isn't."

"But anybody could see you at Hammond's."

"Oh, no, they couldn't. Mrs. Hammond was our cook ages ago, when we were small children, and she knows all about the row. Polly is her especial pet, and she will do anything for Polly. So she lent us her own sitting-room. Not a soul knew anything about it."

"And have you any news?"

"Not exactly news. Father has forbidden them to go to the Hospital Ball."

"Oh, no!"

"Yes. Apparently all the house is going to be put into a state of retreat and penitence because of my sins and delinquencies. Did you hear anything this afternoon, Flo?"

"No, not in the way of news, dear. Your mother looks very ill, and seems to be feeling more shattered than usual. By the bye, she is coming up here to see you as soon as she is a little better."

"He won't let her."

"I don't think," said Flo, "that he will venture, autocrat as he is, to give your mother any distinct orders on that subject. At all events, she is certainly coming. And you will go to the ball, of course."

"Well, I don't know. I think if my sisters are forbidden to go it will be rather mean."

"What do they say about it?"

"Oh, they? They're awfully good about it,—awfully unselfish. They say, go and enjoy yourself; try to forget that the Abode of Peace has any existence. By the bye, they're going to church on Sunday."

"Really?"

"They say so. They are like all the rest of us," said the girl, nursing her knee and staring into the fire with a hard, troubled gaze; "they've found out the hollowness of the sanctuary and everything that goes on in it, so they say they're going to church."

"I'm afraid," rejoined Flo, "that going to church won't help them while they go there utterly out at elbows with their father, any more than sanctuary will help them so long as their father, who founded it, is utterly out at elbows with you. What a pity, Rachel, that you don't like John Strode! I mean—— Oh, don't think that I'm advocating that man's claims, that man's attentions,—no, no. But what a pity that your father didn't fix on somebody that you did like; somebody that you would have liked for a husband; somebody like—like——"

"I shouldn't like anybody if I was thrown at his head in that way," said Rachel, promptly. "What girl worth her salt would? No, no; fathers in Christian England, as they're so fond of calling it, should let their sons and their daughters make their own plans in life. A little advice, an opinion, just a bias,—that is allowable enough; but I tell you this, that if John Strode had been a duke and I had been in love with him to the very tips of my fingers, to the last shred of my heart, I would still hold back if a marriage was hatched up without my knowledge and without my consent. Yes, I will go to the ball, just to show the Biggs lot and all the others who are standing around wondering whether I shall bend or break, that I've got a will of my own and that I mean to use it."

"Perhaps he'll relent and let the others go."

"My father never relents," said Rachel; "at least, I have never known him to do so, and I don't think that in the face of present events he is likely to change in that respect. Ah! here they are."

And Rachel proved herself to be a true prophet. Mr. Gorman had forbidden the three girls at the Abode of Peace to go to any outside entertainment whatever. In vain did Mrs. Gorman entreat of him to alter his decision; in vain did she remind him that Matty, for instance, without a single word, without a struggle, without any show of repining, had given up her heart's desire at her father's bidding.

"It is hard," she said, "that Matty, of all people, should be punished because Rachel has gone against you."

"I have spoken," said the old man.

"And you won't do it for me?"

"My dear love," he said, suddenly softened, "if you ask me, how can I refuse you anything? But I hope that you will not ask me."

And Mrs. Gorman sank back in her chair, the words frozen on her lips, her whole soul more crushed than she might have been had he struck her. As soon as he was gone she blamed herself.

"Your father told me," she broke out to Matty,—"he told me that if I asked he could refuse me nothing. Then he asked me not to ask it. Matty, I couldn't do it."

"My dear," said Matty, "do you think that one ball more or less matters to us? We don't care; don't distress yourself. We wouldn't, any of us, make you unhappy by pining after a mere pleasure that might be no pleasure at all. Put it out of your mind, dear mother."

"Rachel is going?"

"Oh, yes, Rachel is going. Matt is giving her a new dress. She didn't want to go; she felt, as we were not to be let to have such a pleasure, that it would be selfish of her. But Polly and Beth talked her out of it, and, as Flo very sensibly says, if she were to stay at home it would look as if there were some slur upon her and she could not go. Her dress—I went to see it at Hardman's—is beautiful. I wish you could see her,—see her in it."

"And she is bright?"

"Oh, yes, she is very bright. Do you think, mother, that he will ever change?"

"I don't think so," Mrs. Gorman replied. "Your father is not of a changeable nature. I have never known him change. Look back over your life, child, and tell me, when your father had ever decided on any point in question, however unimportant, did he ever give the matter a thought again or allow any other opinion to come in front of his. But he has always been the same, even in small things; and I don't think that he will ever take any different

tone, even in this matter between Rachel and John Strode."

For a moment there was silence between the mother and daughter. Mrs. Gorman had found her way into her daughter's room as she was undressing for the night. She was seated on a little chair by the fire, her strained face in contrast to her handsome velvet dinner-gown, in the bosom of which some diamonds twinkled bravely. Mrs. Gorman was of a nature which would have scorned to go differently to her wont because she was not of the same mind as her husband, and she never thought of allowing her natural grief to make any difference in the matter of her toilet.

Matty had moved softly about the room, brushing her hair and performing several small offices of her toilet while they talked. Then she came in her white dressing-gown and stood opposite to her mother. She looked at her half-doubtfully, toyed with one or two of the girlish nicknacks on the chimney-shelf, and at last said, "Mother, I want to ask you something."

"Yes?"

"Well . . . What is it that makes John Strode have such influence with my father?"

Mrs. Gorman looked up. "I don't know."

"Don't you, really?"

"No. I have no idea; I cannot imagine. Per-

sonally I think that he is the most loathsome young man that I know,—that I ever knew. I said as much to your father once. He did not seem to agree with me. He told me that it pleased him to have John Strode at his table, so I never said anything more about it."

"I have been thinking," said Matty, "a good deal about him lately. You know, mother, the influence is all on one side. My father has no influence with John Strode."

"What makes you say that?"

"If he had, he would go to sanctuary,—he would be a Peacemaker. But he laughs at it."

"No, no."

"Yes; I have heard him. I have heard him what he called 'chaff' my father for his views. Anyway, the influence is all on one side. "I'd give," said Matty, suddenly bringing her hand down with a bang upon the wooden mantel-shelf,—“I'd give a great deal if I knew the whole mystery of John Strode."

There was a moment's silence; then Mrs. Gorman suddenly uproused herself.

"Well, my dear, I cannot help you to it, and the subject is not so interesting that we need stop out of our beds to discuss it. It is bad enough to have the man himself here. Good-night, my darling; don't worry about it. So long as he is kept from marrying Rachel, that is all I care about."

But Matty sat down in the chair which her mother had just vacated and stirred the fire into a brilliant blaze, that she might enjoy the luxury of a good think. A new idea had come to her that night, an idea that perhaps John Strode . . . But no, it could not be that! Yet, he might well be some relation, some person connected in some way with their family, so that her father was anxious to make provision for him. And yet, she had always understood that John Strode was rich, that he was the rich son of a rich father. He had a lovely place, fine horses, smart carriages, and a yacht. Could it be that her father was anxious to secure a position of wealth for one of his children? Could it be that her father was not as well off as they had always believed? But no, there could be no trouble of that sort, or Matt would be in the secret. She was fain to confess at the end of her thinking that she had solved no mystery, that she was no nearer to an elucidation thereof. It was a mystery, and a mystery, apparently, it must remain.

And then she fell a-dreaming of the days long gone by, the days when a minor tragedy had come into her life. Yes, she called it a minor tragedy, even to herself; but she had not thought it so then, when hope's fairy blossom had been blighted in its bud, when all the tendrils of love had been ruthlessly torn from her heart, when the man who loved

her had been dismissed with a curt "no" for answer, and her feelings had been considered no more than one would consider the feelings of the beetle that one treads upon. It had seemed no minor tragedy then. But now, in the face of this hideous scheme that her father had prepared for Rachel, her own tragedy seemed dwarfed and almost unimportant. At worst she had been bereft, she had never been offered for sale like some unknowing thing which had no power of will.

She sat there for a long time, indeed until the fire burned low in the grate and until a larger cinder than had fallen for some time slipped through the bars and woke her with a start from her brown study.

"Well," she said, stretching her arms out wearily, "it's no use sitting here trying to solve what is a complete mystery. I suppose we shall get at the bottom some day, and if only Rachel has strength of mind enough to hold out, things may come round and be as they were before."

CHAPTER XIX.

A GREAT SOCIAL EVENT.

Why is it that those who would not put their hands in their pockets to the extent of a single guinea with which to swell a subscription list, will put themselves to endless trouble and expense when the self-same list is swelled by some social function?

It may be fairly said that the Hospital Ball was the great pivot upon which the social life of Mullingham turned. All sorts and conditions of society were in the habit of meeting together that night in the Town Hall, which was usually decorated and lighted with all the ingenuity that skill could devise and the electrical company provide. Great ladies living a few miles out of the town, great both in the matter of position and of wealth, filled their houses yearly from roof to basement for the occasion of the Hospital Ball, and, indeed, vied with each other as to who should marshal the largest cohort of beautiful damsels into the great ball-room. People of less importance did their share towards swelling the ranks both of the dancers and the on-lookers, and those who never went to any other ball in the year made it a point of honour to attend the ball given for the benefit of the County Hospital.

The hospital at Mullingham was a very important institution; for Mullingham, being the seat of a manufacturing trade, and also the centre of a large mining district, was in the habit of doing big things in the way of accidents, and at times the hospital, always largely used, was taxed to its utmost resources to accommodate the crushed and broken limbs of those who were from time to time described in the newspapers as "victims."

This year the Hospital Ball was to be on an even grander scale than usual, for two colliery accidents within a few weeks of each other, and a run of desperate cases from the different mills and Works, had unfortunately demonstrated what a hospital board had been urging for several years, that one of the crying necessities of the day was a new wing to be devoted entirely to emergencies and accident cases. So the ladies of the neighbourhood had been pressed into the service, and the price of the Hospital Ball tickets had been doubled; it was a bold move, but one which under the circumstances was permissible enough. Not only had the price of the tickets been doubled, but a committee of ladies had been formed for the purpose of canvassing for the sale thereof; at the head of them the Dean's wife, Lady Emily Maxwell.

In the course of her peregrinations for the selling of tickets Lady Emily had gone as naturally to the Abode of Peace as had been her wont when guinea-

hunting for charity, and when Mrs. Gorman had told her very gently, but decidedly, that she was so grieved and sorry that she could not take any tickets, because Mr. Gorman objected to their attending the ball this year, Lady Emily had gathered her first inkling of the trouble which was brewing in that establishment.

"Not going to let the girls go to the Hospital Ball, Mrs. Gorman!"

"No; I am so sorry, dear Lady Emily," was Mrs. Gorman's response, "but my husband has an objection."

"To the hospital?"

"Oh, no, no; but a private objection. I cannot quite explain to you, but things have not been going very smoothly with us lately, and——"

"Smoothly? Do you mean——?" she broke off short, and turned a pair of eloquent eyes upon the three men-servants who were at that moment serving the tea.

"No, I don't mean in that way," said Mrs. Gorman, comprehending the look. "That has never been one of our worries. We have always," she said, as the door closed behind the men,—“we have always had plenty of money, Lady Emily. I cannot tell you all about it, but my husband is not very well pleased with the girls just now, and he doesn't wish them to go to the Hospital Ball.”

"I shall go and see him about it," said Lady Emily.

"I don't think that he is in."

"No, no, dear Mrs. Gorman, not in that way, not in that way at all; but I will go down to the Works,—I have been there before, as perhaps you know. I will go and beard him, and will tell him how preposterous the whole thing is."

"I am sure he will not take the tickets," said Mrs. Gorman, smiling in spite of herself.

"But I shall tell him that he must support local charities, and I will talk to him,—I will talk to him like a mother!"

"Meantime you must let me give you something towards your fund; the hospital is an institution with which I have great sympathy. It is the fashion, Lady Emily, to speak against hospitals and hospital management, but they do a vast deal of good, there is no gainsaying it."

"Yes, they do when they are properly managed, when they have a proper committee of people of responsible position to look after them," said Lady Emily, now fairly launched on to her favourite topic. "That is why the hospital is such a success here in Mullingham, because you and I and a dozen others who know our way about life and hospitals look after it in more ways than as far as mere money is concerned. If only London institutions of the same kind could be managed as our country ones are it

would be better for everybody concerned. A dreadful case came under my notice only the other day. Muriel has a friend, a parson's daughter, whose mother was left a widow quite early, and not blessed with too much money; and this girl—one of several—determined to become a nurse. Not being one-and-twenty, she found great difficulty in being taken on anywhere. Of course, it stands to common sense, and if she had not been so plucky as to be almost headstrong, she would have waited until she was one-and-twenty, or have taken some private work which would have begun her nursing education and yet would not have drained her strength before she had sufficient strength to stand that particular kind of draining. But this girl, feeling herself fit and capable and enthusiastic, went from one place to another, until at last she got accepted at a fever hospital in the East End of London. She was then nineteen years old. Yes, thank you, I will have another piece of that cake; it is excellent. No, I have not finished my tea yet, thank you. Well, this girl went down to this hospital full of hope, full of courage, full of enthusiasm. She ought, in the natural course of events, to have done her three years in some recognized hospital or infirmary, and to have taken a spell at a fever hospital after that; but she put the cart before the horse, and she began at East End Fever Hospital. She was immediately put upon night

duty, and was kept at it three months. No, I don't say so much about that," as Mrs. Gorman gave a cry of horror, "because, after all, it is easier, and most nurses find it so, and most navvies find it so too, mind you, than it would be to do week in and week out of day and night work; but the hospital was so frightfully under-nursed, and from the matron downwards there was very little to choose in point of technical experience, that the most outrageous and unheard-of things were of daily occurrence among them. For instance, nurses in fever hospitals, which are extremely trying as well as dangerous, because you have to nurse fever or infectious cases all the time, as you must know, ought to be thoroughly well nourished and cared for outside the wards. The food in this place was abominable; nine times out of ten the wretched nurses turned from it with loathing and went hungry. A nurse in a fever hospital, particularly one who is on night duty, should be made to take a proper amount of air and exercise every day. It is a regular rule, you know, that nurses in fever hospitals shall take exercise in the grounds thereof and have their half holiday every week, being thoroughly disinfected before leaving the building. This particular fever hospital has no grounds, and the nurses are expected to take their two hours of exercise trailing about the drab, uninteresting, endless, weary East End

streets. *They are never disinfected.* The process by which the public is safeguarded consists simply of changing the cotton ward-gown for an outdoor one; the cotton ward-gown hangs under the same curtain and on adjacent pegs to the outdoor gown and outdoor garments, and every time that a nurse from this hospital takes exercise she carries with her myriads of fever and diphtheria microbes, which she scatters freely and disinterestedly as she walks along the crowded and unwholesome streets. Even for half-holidays they go on the principle of what the eye never sees the heart never grieves for, and the disinfecting process is no more thorough than that which I have just described. Fortunately for the public, the nurses are generally too tired to take the trouble of changing their clothes, and spend the two hours' rest allotted for exercise either on their beds or in sewing for themselves, only going into the outer world on their weekly half-holidays. You will hardly believe it, dear Mrs. Gorman, but at the same time you may accept it as being simply, absolutely, and entirely truthful, when I tell you that when an unfortunate baby died in this brilliant institution, none of the nurses, ward-sisters, not even the matron herself, knew how to perform the last offices which the poor little thing required, and ran about from one to the other asking how they should make a shroud! Everything was managed in the same

way. My daughter's friend, however, determined that she would remain the two years necessary to acquire a character. When she had been nine months in this precious institution the time came round for her summer holiday, a fortnight. She arrived at her home looking such a wreck and seemed so completely used up, worn out, and ill, that her mother and sisters entreated her to leave and to take a long rest. This she absolutely refused to do, and at the end of the fortnight she went back again and took up her work once more. A short time afterwards she was stricken with the measles. She knew that she had them by her own symptoms, and represented this to the matron. The matron insisted that she had not got the measles, and pooh-poohed the whole affair, though the girl was feeling extremely ill. However, ultimately it turned out that the girl was right,—that she had veritable measles,—and where do you think she was laid up? Not in any isolation, not a bit of it. She just went to her own bed in the nurses' dormitory, and remained there as short a time as possible. Then, when she was able to get about, without any change, almost without any period of rest, almost without any period of convalescence, she was put straight on to night duty again. They were, as usual, short-handed, for in this precious hospital, naturally, the nurses were always leaving. She dragged on for

almost three months longer, and finally, after complaining of feeling excessively ill, and being told that she was only suffering from a little indigestion, she left in a hurry and is at this moment down with severe typhoid fever, from which it is very doubtful whether she will ever fully recover. Now, I take it," Lady Emily went on, "that in this hospital there is a board of men. Men are extremely unobservant, even doctors, but I do not think that with a board of ladies paying regular visits and thoroughly looking in to the working of the establishment that it would be possible for such cases as this to exist."

"But what about the matron?" asked Mrs. Gorman.

"The matron? Oh, well, you wouldn't have a hospital board made of matrons! In nine cases out of ten, when a woman becomes a hospital matron, she ceases to be a woman, she becomes merely a slave-driver, and it is she who needs to be watched more than anybody on the whole of the nursing staff."

CHAPTER XX.

A WALL OF ADAMANT.

I know of nothing which so offends a woman who has stooped to ask a favour as to have it refused, no matter how sweetly the refusal may be given. It is like a bitter almond which has been skilfully sugared over, still bitter.

LADY EMILY MAXWELL drove down the next day to that part of Mullingham where the Gorman Works were situated. An ordinary lady would probably not have found Mr. Gorman very readily, but Lady Emily Maxwell was well known to the employés of whom she enquired, and she very soon found herself crossing the threshold of the master's private office.

Mr. Gorman rose from his accustomed seat at the big desk with a certain unction in his manner.

"The Lord's peace be with you," was his greeting.

"Oh, thank you so much, Mr. Gorman, thank you. The same to you and many of them," said Lady Emily, quite forgetting that he had not wished her a happy New Year. "I hope you are not very busy."

"I am always rather busy, Lady Emily, but never too busy to receive you," said he, giving her the biggest easy-chair in the room.

"Ah, now, that's very good of you to say that; that's now really extremely good of you. I wanted to see you, Mr. Gorman, particularly, because I went to see your dear and charming wife yesterday about the Hospital Ball."

Mr. Gorman's face hardened.

"Your wife—that is—you are going to let the girls come to the ball, are you not?"

"I think not, this year," said Mr. Gorman.

"Oh, but, Mr. Gorman, that is really too bad of you. Here are all the ladies on the committee moving heaven and earth to have a success this year, a huge success, so as to be able to build this new wing, and you, one of our chief supporters, won't do your best to help us or let your daughters come to it! It is perfectly preposterous!"

"I—I do not wish my daughters to go to the ball this year."

"But why?"

"I do not wish it," said he, in a stately manner which would have snubbed most ladies into a state of silence or of trembling fear.

"You have reasons? Well, yes, I suppose you have; I suppose they've been naughty girls, have they? Well, now, Mr. Gorman, you must forgive them. You preach peace, you know; and I am sure your children they must be very sorry, and you cannot, you really cannot mean them to miss the

ball for any small misdemeanours they may have committed."

"Lady Emily," said Mr. Gorman, in a very sweet tone, which to one of his own family would have betokened even more determination than was usual with him,—“Lady Emily, I cannot discuss my daughters with any one. I do not wish them to go to the ball, and if they do go, they will do it in defiance of my wishes. I am not so puffed up with my own conceit as to imagine that our presence or absence will make any difference to the success of the evening or to the state of the hospital finances. I have never been behindhand in giving to the funds of the hospital, and I have no intention of beginning to be niggardly now. I am not going to the ball myself, and I do not wish my daughters to do so. I think I need not say any more.”

“Well, Mr. Gorman, I am quite aware,” said Lady Emily, “that you mean to snub me and to tread me out quite flat upon the ground; but you know we parsons’ wives are very unsnubable creatures, and being as intimate with your wife as I am, and taking as much interest in your daughters as I do, and coming and bleeding you for purposes of charity as often as I do, I think that I am somewhat of a privileged person. What is it? Cannot I help you out of this?”

“No, Lady Emily, I don’t think that you can.”

"Open confession, you know, is good for the soul."

He shot a glance at her which was not a peaceful glance, quite the contrary ; but Lady Emily, serene and safe in her position of birth and power, sat looking benignly at him over her aquiline nose, and neither realized, nor cared to realize, what a tumult she was raising in the bosom of the old man.

"Lady Emily, I must ask you to excuse me," he said, beginning to fidget among the papers before him.

"Yes, yes, I know ; but you know I am a very privileged person, and, Mr. Gorman, your girls have always gone to the ball ; the ball will be nothing without them. Do think about it ; do reconsider your decision. I went to see your wife yesterday, and she told me you would not let them go. I told her that I should come and see you about it."

"I have nothing to add to what my wife has already told you," said Mr. Gorman, beginning to be more precise in manner and in tone with each moment that went by. "I shall be very pleased to give you a donation for the new wing, I think it is an excellent project, but you must please not——"

"Not ask any questions, or seek to pry into my neighbours' business," said Lady Emily, with a bland little laugh. "Ah, Mr. Gorman, I don't know when I have been so snubbed as this morning ; and from you, of all people, too ! It is odd."

"Far be from me any desire to snub you, Lady Emily," said Mr. Gorman, opening a drawer at his left hand and taking therefrom a cheque-book. "Shall I write you a little cheque now?"

"Oh, yes, thank you; we are by way of taking all we can get. We shall want more than we shall receive, and we shall be most obliged, and the larger you make it the more obliged we shall be; but, at the same time, it won't compensate me for the absence of your daughters."

"I am sorry for that, because they are not going to the ball," said Mr. Gorman, beginning to write. Then he signed his name with a flourish, turned the cheque-book over, pressed it upon the blotting-pad, tore out the leaf and folded it in four. "Shall I put it into an envelope, Lady Emily, or will you have it in your purse?"

"Oh, I will take it in my bag here, thank you,—and cross it, will you? Thank you so much." She opened her velvet bag, which had a beautiful silver top and chain, and held out her hand for the piece of paper.

"I have crossed it," he said, as he handed it to her.

"May I look at it?"

"Oh, certainly."

She opened the folded cheque. "Five hundred pounds! Mr. Gorman, this is munificent!"

"It is not too much?" he asked.

"Oh, no, no; I will take it as a first donation, if you like, but, joking apart, it is extremely handsome, and I am most obliged to you,—most obliged. And I am sure the Dean will be; poor thing, he is worn to death by this hospital business, and he will be most obliged to you, most obliged and grateful." She slipped the chain of the bag over her wrist and rose from her chair. "Well, good-bye, Mr. Gorman; my best thanks. I wish you were less hard-hearted. You have made me at once very glad and very sorry. I think I shall come every morning and see if I cannot make you relent."

Mr. Gorman bowed over her hand.

"If you will honour me every morning," he said, in his most dignified and courtly manner, "I cannot say but that I should be extremely pleased to see you; but I cannot give you any other answer on that question."

The lady heaved a great sigh.

"Ah, dear, dear; you are very difficult to treat with, very. Well, having got so much out of you, I suppose I mustn't abuse you, for I am most grateful for the cheque; it is most kind of you. Well, good-bye, good-bye, and thank you very much again."

She allowed him to put her into her carriage, and drove away with a wave of her hand. But just outside the gates she chanced to see Mrs. Wilson coming waddling along the road.

"Stop, John!" she said. "Good-morning, Polly."

"Ah, my lady, good-morning. Is that you? I suppose you've been to see the master?"

"Yes, Polly, I have. Are you going into the Works?"

"I am only going to leave a bit of a note for Wilson, my lady; that is all. Oh, I know better than to go into them Works. What would they want with an old thing like me worrying around?"

"Well, I've been worrying around," said Lady Emily. "Here, Charles, take Mrs. Wilson's note in. Get in beside me, Polly; I want to talk to you."

With a little difficulty Mrs. Wilson got into the carriage and sat down beside Lady Emily. "What is it, my lady? You look troubled."

"I am troubled, Polly, I am troubled. I have been to try and persuade Mr. Gorman—a good man, Polly, but very autocratic—I have been to try and persuade him to let those poor girls go to the Hospital Ball. I might as well have talked to the kerbstones!"

"Ah! 'e's not against the hospital, surely."

"Against it? No. He gave me five hundred pounds towards the new wing,—indeed, I am not sure whether it is not merely a first donation; but let his children go to the ball, he won't! What is the matter there, Polly?"

"Well, my lady," said Polly, "if what I 'ear is

true, they say my darling young lady, my sweet child, Miss Rachel, wants to marry John Strode."

"Oh, that is preposterous!"

"And they say that 'er pa won't 'ear of it."

"I should think not, indeed."

"And she's left 'ome, my lady."

"What?"

"Yes, she is staying up at 'The Larches,' with Mr. Matthew and 'is wife. Mr. Matthew takes 'is sister's part, and, if what my neighbour Mrs. Biggs tells me is true, and I see no reason to doubt it, Mr. Matthew is conniving at 'is sister's doing just as she likes in the matter."

"Oh, well, if that is so, what wonder that Mr. Gorman is angry and vexed? But still, it seems rather hard that he shouldn't let the other three girls go to the ball, doesn't it, Polly? Can't you do anything to persuade him?"

"My lady, my lady, if you 'ave failed, 'ow is it likely I should succeed? I've about as much influence with Mr. Gorman as, as your carriage 'orses 'ave."

"But Mr. Wilson has——"

"Wilson,—yes; Wilson 'as a deal of influence with the master, that's true," said Mrs. Wilson, with the air of one who is pondering deeply.

"Ah, here is Charles back again. Where do you want to go, Polly?"

"Just where you like, my lady, 'ome or into the town; it's all one to me."

"Well, drive into the town with me a little way, and then I'll bring you back. Into the town, into the High Street, Charles. Do you think," Lady Emily went on eagerly, as soon as they were fairly started,—“do you think that Mr. Wilson could do anything to bring him to reason?”

"Well, I was just thinking, my lady, I was just thinking. You see, Wilson 'as unbounded influence at the Works, and in matters of business I've 'eard the master say over and over again that Wilson's 'is right-'and man; but whether 'e'd take kindly to Wilson's interfering with family matters is more than I can say. Now I should think if anybody 'ad any influence it's Mr. Matthew."

"But he is so fond of his sisters, surely he would do his best for them."

"Maybe 'e 'as," said Mrs. Wilson, sensibly. "At all events, Miss Rachel's staying up there."

"And you think it wouldn't do to get your husband to say a word?"

"Why, I don't think it would," replied Mrs. Wilson, "I really don't think it would. Because, you see, perhaps you and the Dean wouldn't take it very well if I was to go interfering with my dear Miss Muriel."

"Well, perhaps I shouldn't, Polly, perhaps I

shouldn't. But it is vexing. Poor girls, they must be heart-broken."

A little later in the day Lady Emily passed Polly and Beth Gorman in the High Street. She at once stopped the carriage and called to them.

"My dears, what is this that I hear about your not going to the Hospital Ball?"

"Oh, father won't let us go," replied Polly, promptly.

"But why?"

"Oh, he's so angry with Rachel."

"But why? What has Rachel done? Does she really want to marry John Strode?"

Lady Emily asked the question as if a more preposterous notion could not enter a girl's heart.

"Rachel! Marry John Strode! Oh, Lady Emily, that is just it."

"What, what is just it?"

"That she won't marry John Strode."

Lady Emily's bland expression changed.

"Do you mean me to understand that your father wishes such a marriage?"

"Yes; he insists upon it."

"That Rachel should marry John Strode?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"We don't know. Father likes him."

"Likes John Strode! Oh, my dear, I might well

be unsuccessful when I went and entreated him to allow you to go to the ball. I thought it was all the other way, and that he was so vexed with her for wanting to marry John Strode."

"But she refuses, she absolutely refuses!" Polly cried, unable to help laughing at Lady Emily's mystified countenance. "And that's why she's gone to stay at 'The Larches' with Matt and his wife, because she won't marry John Strode."

"Dear me! Well, my dear, you've given me quite a shock. You don't say so! Well, I did my best to persuade your father to allow you to go, but, really, I—I—I shouldn't like to quarrel with him, for he is most good and generous when I want help of any kind; but, my dear girl, I shouldn't like to go again!"

"Oh, well, it wouldn't be any use, Lady Emily, because father never changes his mind, and when he says 'no' he means 'no;' so the moment he said we were not to go to the ball, we gave up any idea of thinking about it or fretting about it. And, after all, what is a ball more or less? It would only make mother unhappy if we worried, and so we don't think about it; we are not going, that is all. But thank you all the same for going and asking father; it was awfully good of you, awfully good. But please, dear Lady Emily, don't worry about us."

"My dear," said Lady Emily, "you have given me quite a shock."

CHAPTER XXI.

BREAKING BOUNDS.

You know the old adage, "One man may lead a horse to the water, but twenty cannot make him drink," and you probably know by the experience of your observation that, of all circumstances in life, it is most often applicable in affairs of the heart.

ALMOST the first person whom Lady Emily Maxwell saw when she entered the Town Hall on the night of the Hospital Ball was Rachel Gorman, and Rachel was walking across the ball-room with Brooke Barty. Her first thought was that Mr. Gorman had relented and had allowed his daughters to go to the ball after all. Five minutes later, however, she saw Matt Gorman passing near and beckoned to him to come and speak to her.

"I thought your sisters were not to be allowed to come to the ball, Mr. Matthew," she said to him.

"Neither are they, Lady Emily."

"But Rachel is here?"

"Yes, but Rachel is staying with us."

"And you brought her?"

"Yes, we brought her."

"Is this I hear true?"

"I don't know what you heard, but I'm afraid it is," he replied.

She unfurled her fan and held it so that their conversation might be kept strictly to themselves.

"My dear boy," she said, looking at him very much over the aquiline nose, "what can your father be thinking of?"

"That's what we ask ourselves every day, all of us."

"Did he consent to Rachel's coming?"

"Oh, no. Rachel is cut adrift."

"Cut adrift? What do you mean by that?"

"What do I mean, Lady Emily? Why, that she has been turned out."

"From home?"

"From home, Lady Emily; yes."

"Do you mean to tell me that your father has turned your sister out of the house?"

"Yes."

"Then where, may I ask, does the Peacemaking come in?"

"That's what we all want to know," said Matt, with a grim appreciation of the humorous side of the situation that was not lost upon the Dean's wife. "The fact is, I heard the Dean say something the other day to my mother that seemed to put the entire situation and hit the nail on the head as completely as if he had known what was going to happen in the immediate future. He said that he always told his good friend Mr. Gorman that Peacemaking was a

little *religion de luxe*, very well fitted for the rich and temperate few, but not for the work a day world. That, Lady Emily, puts the whole case in a nutshell. As long as the whole creed of the Peacemakers meant no more than so much personal kowtow to my father, the scheme worked beautifully; the moment that anybody in the community ventures to have an opinion of their own, Peacemaking has gone to—to pot. So long as my father is held as a sort of first cousin to God Almighty, it is an admirable religion; but so soon as the rest of the sect find out that they've got not only bodies, but souls and *hearts* of their own, then the linch-pin seems to be gone. I never exactly believed in it myself. I was born in it, and I thought it as good as any other mode of living a decent life; in fact, I didn't think much about it, one way or the other; but I see now that no man can start a religion of his own. It's so apt to be just a nice little comfortable religion which will just suit himself, and often only prove an easy fit for him as long as things go smoothly and pleasantly."

"Ah," said the Dean's wife, "there is a great deal in that."

"There is everything in it," said Matt. "You know it is all fair enough that he who pays the piper shall choose the tune, but there comes a day when somebody else would like to pay the piper, there comes a day when somebody else cannot dance to

the tune chosen by another, and my poor little sister has found it out already."

"She is quite firm?"

"Oh, firm as a rock."

"And who is the young man she is dancing with now? I can't see. Was it Mr. Barty?"

"Yes."

"Ah! a very good antidote to John Strode. Is John Strode here to-night?"

"Oh, yes, in great form, with a diamond like a shilling in his shirt-front, and his hair fresh cropped, and an orchid in his button-hole, and the shiniest boots, Lady Emily, that ever came out of a shoemaker's shop. I like shiny boots myself," he went on, sticking his own foot out and looking at it reflectively, "and I like an orchid in my button-hole, and I like a man's hair to be well cropped, and I don't know that I very strongly object to a diamond shirt-stud, although I've never worn one myself, but, somehow, all these things on John Strode become very offensive, most offensive, and I feel every time I look at him such an itching in my foot to go and give him a downright good thundering kicking. I only hope, Lady Emily, that I shall be able to keep that feeling in check without committing myself very deeply, because I suppose that, after all, it is a sort of compliment when even a John Strode wants to marry a lady."

"I don't think so," said Lady Emily; "I really don't think so. Well, my dear Matt, you and I cannot sit here talking all the evening,—I must call you Matt, as I used to do when you were a boy——"

"I wish you would."

"Yes; it is not quite proper, I suppose, but I like you so much,—I like you so much; I always thought you one of the nicest boys I ever knew. You're as nice as your mother, which is saying a great deal; most boys are not. But we must not stop here talking all the evening, because we both have the interests of the hospital at heart,—we both have work to do. By the bye, your wife has not been to speak to me. Tell her she is not to neglect me; I don't like to be neglected. And I will take my opportunity of telling that dear child—not to be obstinate against her father, oh, dear, no, but to be strong and firm in her own rights. Yes, I think even the Dean would say I was right in that. Now, my dear boy, go and do your duty, and I will do mine."

"Hullo, Matt!" said a man, as Matthew walked away in quest of his wife; "Lady Emily looked as if she was giving you a curtain lecture."

"Well, she wasn't; she was giving me some very excellent advice, which I mean to take. She is a very fine woman, and she knows what she's talking about," was Matthew's prompt reply.

He did come across his wife presently, radiant in

a smart pink gown and all the advantages of an excellent partner.

"Flo," he said, "don't neglect to go and speak to Lady Emily; she told me you hadn't spoken to her yet. Go pretty soon. By the bye, she knows all about the row."

"She sides with us, of course?"

"Oh, yes. Are you having a good time?"

"Oh, yes; quite a splendid time. What are you going to do?"

"Well, I'm just going to look after some of the people at the door. I promised I would stay about there for half an hour and look after the late comers, get them partners, and make myself generally useful."

So the evening wore away in all the delicious whirl of general success. Never had such a crush been known, even at a Hospital Ball. The brilliant toilettes, many handsome uniforms, blazing jewels, costly flowers, and radiant happiness of those participating all served to make a brilliant and successful whole.

"Rachel, my dear," said Lady Emily, an hour later, as Rachel approached her on Brooke Barty's arm, "you look quite charming to-night; I have never seen you look better. Are you enjoying yourself very much?"

"Oh, very much, Lady Emily, thank you,—very much indeed."

"Well, don't stay wasting precious time talking to an old woman like me; go away and enjoy yourself still more, dear. Mind you take care of her, Mr. Barty."

They were on their way to sit out a dance in one of the corridors leading to the offshoots from the great hall of the building.

"Not that way," said Brooke Barty, as she would have turned to the right. "Come this way. There is the jolliest little corner here where we can sit most happily for as long as we like. There, now, isn't this jolly?"

"Oh, yes; perfectly charming," cried Rachel, seating herself on the sofa, which was well screened from general view.

Brooke Barty sat down beside her. "Let me fan you," he said.

He fanned her so vigorously that she presently cried out to him to stop. "Enough, enough; I am quite cold!"

And then, somehow, as they sat there, he reverted to the careless words which Lady Emily Maxwell had let fall.

"She said I was to take care of you," he said. "I wish, Rachel, I wish that you would let me take care of you for always."

"She meant it in jest,—she meant for the moment."

"But I wish that you would let me take care of you for always."

He had been waiting so long for the opportunity,—well, after all, it was only a few weeks, but they had seemed long to him,—and she had been hoping and yet dreading to hear some such words as these, more than half inclined in the face of recent events to forswear herself from declarations of any kind, and yet, when it came so simply, so naturally, and yet so earnestly, there was no idea in Rachel Gorman's mind of putting off the day for a single moment.

"Do you?" she said.

She had laid her bouquet—a beautiful posy of white flowers which he had sent to her—down on the couch beside her; she was busily toying with the mother-o'-pearl sticks of her feather fan, and she looked down at her white gloved fingers as if all her attention was necessary to the very trivial occupation which she had found. He caught them passionately, fan and all, in his own.

"You know that I do," he said. "I should have spoken out ever so long ago, only I felt that you had been so wronged, so startled out of yourself by all that has happened, that my lips were sealed. And yet, you must have known all along exactly what I was feeling. You will? You will give yourself to me, won't you? Surely, in the face of all this, your father would not refuse you to me?"

"I don't think that my father will ever give you his consent."

"Well, so long as you give me yours—which you have not done yet—nothing else matters. I will go and see him to-morrow, if you will give me leave. But first—first of all—I'd like you to give me the leave, you know."

She looked up at him with a laugh that was half shy and half glad.

"Oh, Mr. Barty!" she said.

And then he—well, you know how these things happen; somehow his arm found its way round her, and she herself was drawn quite close to him. And then there was no doubt that Rachel Gorman and Brooke Barty had plighted their troth for all time.

How long they sat there in that pleasant hiding-place I should not like positively to say. It was a long time. Several partners were seeking Rachel all over the place, but without success in finding her. And when at last they did find their way back to everyday life, Brooke Barty suggested that supper would not be a bad idea, and carried her off in search of it. However, even newly betrothed couples cannot altogether have their own way and break down already existing engagements, and before either of them had begun to think about moving away from the table at which they had ensconced themselves an imperative partner appeared upon the

scene and insisted upon Rachel fulfilling her obligations.

So Brooke Barty, feeling very much at peace with the world himself, and everybody else, sauntered out into the ball-room, and by an accident found himself close to Matthew Gorman.

"Hullo, old chap, you not dancing?" said Matt.

"I've danced enough, thank you," Barty replied.

Matt looked at him sharply. "Not having a very good time?"

"Oh, my dear chap, yes; the very best possible time. I never enjoyed myself more in all my life. I don't happen to be dancing this minute."

"Can I get you a partner?"

"Oh, thank you, no, my dear fellow, no. I'm going to dance again presently." Then he hooked his arm into Matthew Gorman's. "I say, old fellow, I've done it!"

"Done it? Done what?"

"I've spoiled John Strode's chance."

"By Jove, you don't say so! Is it all settled?"

"Between ourselves; yes, all settled."

"By Jove, I'm glad! I'll shake hands with you, Barty! I am glad, by Jove, yes. Oh, how pleased my wife will be! Good luck and happiness to you, old fellow; she's a brick, if ever there was one."

"Of course I've got to face your father yet."

"Well, yes, you have that."

"I'll go and see him to-morrow; I'll go down to-morrow morning and get it over. If he says 'yes,' of course it will be all plain sailing."

"And if he says 'no'?" was Matthew's question.

"If he says 'no,'—if he won't give his consent,—why, we must just do without it, that's all. I would rather have taken my wife from her own home, with the regulation fuss and blessing, and so on; but if I can't get her that way, why, I shall take her the way I can get her. It would be a dreadful nuisance to have to put the banns up somewhere on the sly and run away; but, of course, if your father is obstinate, why, we shan't have any choice in the matter. But surely, when he sees that we are both set upon each other, that we've fixed our hearts,—you know, old chap,—and that the other fellow is absolutely impossible and distasteful to Rachel, surely he'll never hold out longer than that."

"My dear Brooke," said Matthew Gorman, in a very definite tone, "there is no knowing *what* line my father will take. He's a Peacemaker, and Peacemakers, you know, are a very curious set of people. I take it that they're something like fire-worshippers,—all very well as long as you live in a hot climate, where there's plenty of sun to worship, but a dead failure when you get into the misty north, where you've dull skies and clouds *ad libitum*. However, my dear chap, you can but do your best and face the

worst, and whichever way it goes remember she's worth it, and I'll stick by you to the last ounce of influence I've got in me. By Jove, I've never been so pleased about anything in my life before !"

"Not even your own marriage?"

"No, not even my own marriage; because, you see, my mother-in-law is a most sensible woman, who doesn't interfere with her children's legitimate business, and somehow or other my wife and I made up our minds without bothering anybody or anybody bothering us."

"Then your father never attempted to interfere with you?"

"My dear fellow," said Matthew, "it's part of my father's creed that a man shall marry according to his choice. The extraordinary thing is that he doesn't consider the girl should have any choice at all. That's where we're all at loggerheads."

"Then don't you think if I represent to him that Rachel is the girl of my choice he may think it quite right that she should be allowed to marry me,—I mean with bell and book and all that sort of thing?"

"He may. Probably he'll be hard driven between the feeling that you both want her, and you both can't have her. Only, I'm terribly afraid that having given his word and promised his influence to that brute Strode—— And, by Jove, if he isn't asking Rachel to dance now! Look at him!"

"That just reminds me," said Brooke Barty, "she's engaged to me."

"I'm sorry," he heard Rachel say, as he hurried up to her, "that I must refuse you. I am engaged for this dance and for every other dance."

"And I think," said Brooke, offering his arm, and utterly ignoring John Strode, "that you are engaged to me."

CHAPTER XXII.

A MOMENTOUS INTERVIEW.

They say that Christianize the African negro as you will, he will always have lurking somewhere deep down in his heart some traces of his original fetish-worship, which may rise up and possess him again at any moment. And in some English husbands and fathers, in spite of advanced education and the female suffrage question, there still lingers some trace of the old holding that a woman is a chattel and nothing more. It is a sort of Englishman's fetish.

THERE was not much of the caitiff in Brooke Barty's genial nature. By eleven o'clock the following morning he turned in at the big gates of the establishment, which was known as the Gorman Steel Works, and, entering the enquiry office, asked whether Mr. Gorman had yet arrived.

"Oh, yes, sir, an hour and a half ago," was the reply.

"Oh, well, take my card, will you, and ask him if he can see me?"

The young clerk ushered Brooke into the waiting-room and departed on his mission, returning in a few minutes with a message to the effect that Mr. Gorman was extremely busy, would Mr. Barty be able to transact his business with Mr. Matthew?

"I'm afraid not," said Brooke, still in the same

easy tone. "Give my compliments to Mr. Gorman, say that I will wait his pleasure, but that my business is purely personal with himself."

Accordingly, after some minutes' delay, he was escorted to Mr. Gorman's private sanctum.

"Good-morning, Mr. Gorman," said Brooke, stepping easily across the room and holding out his hand.

"The Lord's peace be with you."

"Thank you, very much, I'm sure; the same to you, sir. A fine day, isn't it?"

"A very fine day," replied Mr. Gorman. "Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you, yes; thanks, thanks." And Brooke Barty seated himself in the big chair opposite to Mr. Gorman's desk and settled himself comfortably with his hat upon his knee. "The fact is," he said—"I'm very sorry to disturb you, Mr. Gorman, I know what business hours are, but my business is rather important, and I couldn't possibly transact it with your son."

"I am at your disposal, my dear sir," said Mr. Gorman, with profound civility.

"The fact is, Mr. Gorman, I want to marry your daughter. It's no use beating about the bush; that is what I have come for; I have come to ask your consent."

"Which of my daughters?"

"Rachel—the youngest,—Rachel. I shall be

very pleased to give you every facility for enquiring into my character, my family, my income, my prospects, and all the rest of it. I feel very sure that you can have no objection to me on the score of any of these points."

"You have already asked my daughter to marry you?"

"I have."

"And she has accepted you?"

"Yes."

"Subject to my consent?"

"Well, I suppose we took that for granted; at all events, I have come on the first opportunity to ask it."

"Yes. Well, Mr. Barty, I am very sorry, but I cannot give you a favourable answer."

"And may I ask you why, sir?"

"Because I have other views for my daughter. I think you were present when I announced her engagement to my friend Mr. John Strode. I—I expect my daughter to carry out that engagement."

"My dear sir, you cannot want to marry your daughter to a brute like Strode!"

"Not another word, I beg. If it had been one of my other daughters whom you were anxious to marry, and who was anxious to marry you, I should not have said 'no,' but my youngest daughter is already bespoken, and I am sorry that you are too late."

For a moment Brooke Barty sat stunned by the indomitable and relentless will-power of the old man.

"Mr. Gorman," he said, "is it possible that you mean what you say?"

"I mean every word of it."

"That you would marry your daughter to a man whom she positively loathes!"

"I am not prepared to discuss the question with you," said Mr. Gorman, eying Brooke Barty with straight and unflinching gaze. "I have promised my daughter to my friend John Strode, and there is nothing further to be said on the subject."

"She will never marry him!"

"Excuse me, she will."

Brooke Barty laughed outright. "Well, Mr. Gorman, you have a very extraordinary way of arranging these matters and dealing with your daughter's life; but I suppose there is no use in my wasting your time, or you trying my patience any longer. I think, as a gentleman, as an honest man, that it is my duty to tell you that I am engaged to your daughter Rachel, that I intend to marry her, and that she intends to marry me."

"Not with my consent."

"Then, sir, we shall be obliged to do without it. I am perfectly prepared to lay my past life before you as an open book; I am perfectly prepared to make very large settlements on Rachel and to defer

to you in every possible manner. I would prefer to take my wife straight from her own house from the hands of her father and mother, but if her father is so autocratic as you are, and her mother so weak as Mrs. Gorman, you must forgive me if I take her without this pleasure and without this formality. She will remain with your son until we are married, and, I warn you, we shall be married at the earliest possible moment."

"You cannot legally be married until Rachel comes of age," said Mr. Gorman.

"That's as may be, sir. If it is necessary to wait until Rachel comes of age, I shall cheerfully do so; but although you may compel us to wait until then, it is very certain that you cannot force your daughter into a marriage to which she does not herself consent. Mercifully, that is against the law of the land, and it cannot be done. I am very sorry that you have met me in this way, because I think that one day you will be sorry for it also. So, Mr. Gorman, I will wish you good-morning; but I don't think," turning half back again, and looking at Rachel's father with a steady, stern gaze,—“I don't think that I will go through the farce of calling down the Lord's peace upon you. Good-morning, sir.”

I think, if Brooke Barty had been a young man who was by way of being troubled with gusts of rage, that he would have gone out of Mr. Gorman's

presence that morning in a towering passion. As it was, he only felt it a bore and a nuisance that Matthew's predictions had come true. There would probably be delay, of necessity there would be trouble, in securing Rachel for his wife; but the idea of going back on his quest, of abandoning his wishes, and of leaving Rachel to be forced into a marriage with John Strode never entered his mind.

He looked in at the enquiry office again.

"Is Mr. Matthew in?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Matthew is in," was the reply.

"Ask him if he can see me,—Mr. Barty."

The next moment he found himself mounting the stairs towards Matt's room.

"Well, old chap, what luck?" Matt enquired, as the boy closed the door behind Brooke Barty.

"Oh, just what you predicted. Has other views for her, and doesn't stir an inch from his original standpoint; says he'll make her marry John Strode yet."

"And you?"

"Oh, well, I told him what I thought,—very quietly, you know, and civilly, and all that,—and then I came away."

"What are you going to do now?"

"I am going to find out how soon I can get married. Your father says that I cannot be married legally until she comes of age, but I fancy there

must be a loophole out of that. I shall run up to town to-day and consult my lawyers there. They'll put me up to it if it's possible."

Matt was silent for a minute or so.

"Well, old fellow," he said, "I believe there's only one way of doing it without committing perjury, which is to put the banns up in some out-of-the-way church and trust to luck that the governor hears nothing about it. I fancy you'll find that you can then give Rachel's age,—her real age,—and if you can once get the knot tied there will be no question of its legality."

"Then I'll tell you what I will do. I'll go straight along now to my office and arrange any business that may be pressing, and then I'll go up to lunch to 'The Larches,'—they'll give me some lunch, won't they?"

"Of course they will."

"Well, then, if I run up to town by the five o'clock train, I shall catch my lawyer to-morrow morning as soon as he gets to his office. He'll put me up to it; he's the sharpest chap I ever knew in my life."

"All right; then I'll meet you at one o'clock. We lunch at one sharp."

Matthew Gorman did not, however, get home to "The Larches" at the hour which he had indicated to Brooke Barty. For one thing, he was not very keen on being the one to break the news to his wife

and sister that his father had positively refused to entertain the idea of Brooke Barty in the light of Rachel's husband. For another thing, Mr. Gorman himself quite prevented his son from observing his usual punctuality; for just as Matt was thinking of leaving his office a message came to him that the governor wished to see him.

Mr. Gorman plunged straight into the question just then uppermost in his mind.

"You know, of course, that young man Barty has been to see me this morning?" he broke out, without any beating about the bush.

"Yes."

"And equally, of course, that I told him that I could not entertain the idea."

"It's a thousand pities," replied Matt, bursting out with the remark in quite an involuntary fashion.

"As to that, I am the best judge," said Mr. Gorman. "You had better, since you are so friendly with the young man, make it clear to him that I am one of those people with whom second thoughts are not best; make him clearly understand that I never entertain second thoughts."

"I have," said Matt; "I told him so before he came to you."

"Oh, you did, did you? That was more sensible than I should have thought you would be, Matthew."

"Sensible! My dear father; I didn't do it to serve

your ends; don't you think it. I only did it to save Barty the pain of being refused."

"The end is the same," said Mr. Gorman, with magnificent indifference; "the end is the same. If he persists in his course, he will have to wait until the girl is one-and-twenty, as I shall do everything in my power to prevent their taking the law into their own hands. I should naturally do so."

"Well, I don't know," said Matthew, "where the naturalness comes in; but I suppose we shall not be likely to agree on that point. They will marry, even if they have to wait until Rachel is of age. But there's an old saying which says, you know, sir, 'Love will find out the way,' and I shouldn't at all wonder if love doesn't find out the way in this instance."

"Love!" said Mr. Gorman.

"Yes, sir, love." Then he turned back and looked at his father. "Some day," he said, "you will be very glad that love did find out a way to prevent Rachel from being married to a cad like John Strode; the man is a cad, and you know it. Only a cad would wish to marry a girl who openly declares that she hates him. By the bye, sir, how is my mother this morning?"

"I think she is better," said Mr. Gorman.

"I am glad to hear that. Then that is all you wish to say to me?"

"That is all. You will make it clear to Rachel what she has to expect if she goes against me."

"No, sir, that I cannot do. I do not in the least know what your intentions are with regard to Rachel."

"Simply this. That if she carries out her present rebellious intention of marrying this young man, whom I definitely refused this morning, she will never more be daughter of mine. I shall wipe her name out of my will; I shall wipe her name out of the family record; I shall have done with her,—I shall have done with her; I shall have no daughter Rachel. See that she clearly understands what her position will be."

"Well, as to that," said Matt, sensibly enough, "it doesn't much matter what the position of a girl's father has been after she is once married; then her position depends entirely upon her husband. And surely, sir, you must be perfectly well aware that Mrs. Brooke Barty will take a very different position in the world to anything that could be aspired to by Mrs. John Strode. She may as well go her own way, for if she were to give in to you and marry John Strode she would certainly cut herself off from you as surely as you will cut her off if she marries Brooke Barty, so that she may just as well please herself as far as her relations with you are concerned."

"A dutiful daughter," began the old man, "would

take pleasure and satisfaction in doing her duty and in giving filial obedience to her father."

"Perhaps that is so," said Matt; "but I have always understood that that particular kind of duty went very sorely against the grain when you were a young man. I don't know whether it has ever struck you, sir, that Rachel is more thoroughly a chip of the old block than any one of your other children. She is as like you as two peas." And with this shot he turned on his heel and literally fled.

Meantime Brooke Barty had reached "The Larches" with his news.

"No go, dearest," was the way in which he broke it to his *fiancée*.

"But what possible objection can he have to you?"

"None, not the least in the world,—none whatever. The only objection he gives is that I am not John Strode. He told me if I had wanted to marry one of your sisters he would have been most pleased to welcome me into the family, and so on; but he has promised you to John Strode, and to John Strode he means to give you. Meantime, he says that we shall have to wait until you are one-and-twenty, and that he will put every obstacle in our way that he can think of."

"Oh, there are ways and means of getting married!" exclaimed Mrs. Matthew. "You don't mean to wait until she is of age?"

"Oh, dear, no," replied Barty. "I am going up to town by the five o'clock train to consult my lawyers and see what can be done."

"Did Matt say he would be in to lunch?" asked Mrs. Matthew of Brooke, looking at the clock, the hands of which pointed to ten minutes past the hour.

"He did. He said he would be here at one o'clock sharp."

"Ah, then he's late. I will go and look out for him; I always see him coming along the road."

As Flo closed the door behind her, Brooke Barty turned to Rachel.

"I suppose, dearest," he said, holding her hands in his and looking at her very tenderly, "I suppose that if I make arrangements for pulling off this marriage, you won't draw back, or anything of that kind?"

She looked at him in amazement.

"Draw back, Brooke!" she exclaimed. "Every hour that I am free leaves me in danger of being made to marry John Strode. Make what arrangements you like. Don't think that I am bold, or unfeminine, or anything of that kind; I have gone beyond all those things. I am yours; as soon as you can make arrangements that I shall be yours before the whole world, I am ready for you. Until we have actually come away from the church, I shall not feel myself to be absolutely and entirely safe."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WORM WILL TURN.

Some natures are like sleeping volcanoes, and go on for years and years in absolute mental quiescence; but when once they are roused out of their habitual calm, or when something happens to disturb their usual control over themselves, they are like the molten lava pouring in torrents down the mountain-side. Those who have dominated them before can do nothing more than stand by waiting.

WHEN Mr. Gorman went home to lunch that day to the Abode of Peace, he made a communication to his family. So long as there were servants in the room he spoke on no private topic, but afterwards, when the estimable butler and his underlings had left them, as was their wont, he told them something of what had happened that morning.

"I wish to say something," he said. "No," looking at Matty, "it is not necessary for you to move; I wish you to hear what I have to tell your mother. My dear, you have invited to this house, once or twice, a young man called Barty,—Mr. Brooke Barty."

"Yes," said Mrs. Gorman.

"I don't wish him to be invited here again."

"Very well, Edward."

"I will tell you why. He came to me this morning to ask my consent that he should marry Rachel.

I need hardly tell you that I refused it absolutely. I have other views for Rachel, as she is perfectly well aware. He told me, in very plain terms, that he intends to marry Rachel, and I have warned him, and I have also warned Matthew, what will happen if this conduct is persisted in. Meantime, I do not wish Mr. Barty to be a guest at my house. I understand that Rachel was at the Hospital Ball last evening. I cannot say that I was surprised, for at present nothing surprises me that Rachel does. I thought that all the world knew that I had objected to my daughters attending the ball, and I think that she would have shown better taste had she remained away."

"You see, Edward, you never told her that you did not wish her to go," began Mrs. Gorman.

"She knew my wishes perfectly. She must have known that her sisters were not allowed to go,—that I had objected to their going. However, we will let that pass. She went, and I suppose this ridiculous proposal was hatched up during the course of the evening. At all events, so far as I am concerned, it is disposed of,—entirely disposed of. If they carry it out in spite of me, I shall know what course to take. I shall have no daughter called Rachel."

"Edward, you will not cut her off!"

"Absolutely. She has the alternative. She chooses between me and this young man whom she never saw until a few weeks ago."

"No, Edward, not between you and Mr. Barty, because you are not content that the child should stay in your house as she has done all her life until now; you would force her into the arms of this horrible young man."

"He is my friend, Margaret, and that should keep him sacred from abuse. However, we need not discuss it at this moment. What I wish to say is this: that for the present I do not wish my daughters to visit at the house of their brother. If my son chooses to defy me, and my daughter and my son's wife choose likewise to defy me, that is no reason why my daughters who have not yet gone against me should give their countenance to those who do so. You hear my wishes," looking at Matty. "As long as you live in my house I have a right to your obedience. You understand me. I wish all communication between this house and 'The Larches' to cease."

"Very well," said Matty.

It was not that the girl was afraid of her father, it was not that she was cowed by him; her sole desire was to spare her mother from any possible trouble. It was the same instinct which led her to look at her sisters and sign to them to go with her out of the room. She felt that her mother would be best left alone at this juncture.

For a minute or two neither Mr. nor Mrs. Gor-

man spoke. Then by an immense effort Mrs. Gorman nerved herself to say what was in her mind.

"Edward," she began, "I wanted to say something to you."

"Very good, my dear; I am ready to listen."

"It may not be very pleasant to you," she said, gently, "but I must say it for all that. I have not often gone against you in all the years we have been married; I have loyally done everything which I believed would please you."

"I have never found fault with you," he reminded her.

"No, Edward, I know it; but at the same time there is a place even for a husband to stop at, and when you say that all communication between this house and our son's house must cease, you touch that point."

"And why?"

"Because Matthew is my son; because Rachel is my daughter. If you choose, unjustly, to cut them off from you, that is your affair. You cannot insist, or expect, that I, who brought them into the world, shall join you in your tyranny."

"Margaret!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I know what you would say,—that never have I spoken to you like this before in all the years that we have been married; I would not do so now if I were not driven to desperation, if I did not feel,

as I have felt day by day during these last few weeks, that some one has come in between us who had vowed to be all the world to each other. That some one is the man John Strode. What the tie which binds him to you is I do not know, I do not want to know; as you wish him to marry our daughter, it cannot be a tie which under other circumstances I should be inclined to imagine. For this man, whatever binds him to you, you have ruined your home, you are breaking my heart day by day. Well, I say nothing. I have all these years patiently and meekly taken the second place, lived in you, for you, through you, strangled my desires, given up my own wishes, my own will, my own way, until I have come to be little more than a mere figure-head, a cipher. But there is a place to stop at, and we have touched it. So long as it is only my will and happiness, my humanity that you would sacrifice, they are yours, laid at your feet with the love you have never valued; but when you would sacrifice the hearts and the happiness of my children, when you would step in between them and me, I say you must stop. While I am your wife, I must have liberty to see my children when and how I will. While I am the mistress of your house my son must be free to visit me, and my daughter."

"And are you, too, turning against me?" he asked, in a voice of thunder.

She looked at him.

"I turn against you? If you choose to put it so, in that respect. Yes."

"And you will aid and abet her to marry this man?"

"No, I will not do so. But since I have had an inkling that such a thing might be, I have prayed on my knees, with my heart and my soul, day and night, that God would be merciful and bring it to pass; I have prayed the Almighty to deliver my child, my baby, from the cruel fate to which her own father would condemn her, and to give her to the arms of this—*gentleman*. And I will go on praying, Edward (as I will go on praying that God will deliver her from John Strode), that God will deliver her from a fate so hideous, so monstrous as to become the wife of a man whose acquaintance I regard as the greatest blot of your whole life, so far as I know it. I will respect your wishes; I have vowed to you my obedience as I gave you my love; but beyond that not one step will I take. And supposing that I should never speak to this young man again,—this Brooke Barty,—I will love him as only the mother of an outraged daughter knows how to love. I do not ask you to change your decision; I ask nothing of you. I only tell you that I must be free in that one respect."

The old man's heart had undergone a dozen

different phases of feeling during the time that his wife was speaking. At one time she had touched him almost to relenting, almost to giving up his great point; then, when she told him, in tones which admitted of no question, that between her and her children he must not attempt to come, his heart was hardened.

"I am not aware," he said, "that I have ever asked or demanded anything of you which was unreasonable. On the contrary, I have always given you full honour and dignity. I cannot remember, at this moment, that I have ever questioned one of your decisions. I have been under the impression, hitherto, that with me your word has been law. It is news to me to find that I have been a vindictive, crushing, inhuman tyrant, only anxious to make those about me unhappy and wretched."

"I did not say that, Edward."

"You implied as much. Surely I know better what is best for my daughter than she does. How is a child of seventeen years old to know better than her father, who has gained a long experience, what is the best and wisest course for her to follow? Where is this child to have gained this wonderful experience which is to make her above all advice, to make her all-knowing and all-wise?"

"It is not a question of experience, Edward, it is a question of love."

"The child does not know her own mind."

"She knows her mind well enough on both points. She knows well enough that she hates John Strode, and there she is justified, as any well-bred girl would be justified. She knows well enough that she loves the other one. Edward, I was no older than Rachel when I first knew you. Did you think that I was not old enough to know my own mind when I accepted you, when I told you that I loved you? You never said as much. You seemed to think then that the opinion of a girl in her teens was of some importance, nay, of all-importance. Why should my daughter be different to me? Why should she be less able to choose her husband than I was?"

"And yet," he said, "by going against me now it tells me plainly that you do not know your own mind, and that you have never learned to know mine."

"In one sense you are right," she responded, quickly. "I had not learned to know you. When you told me that all the love on earth you had to give was laid at my feet, I believed what you intended me to believe; I did not realize then that I was not to be everything to you. I was young, I did not understand that you were only giving me the outer husk, the shell of what makes life precious to all men and women. I thought that the past at which you hinted was past, gone, done with for ever,

and that I was to be something more than the mistress of your house and the mother of your children. Well, I was wrong; I found it out soon enough. I thought if I was patient, if I made myself everything to you, that in time I should be what I craved to be, that I should have all that I wanted. I have been all these years, Edward, slowly learning a difficult lesson. I have learned it a word at a time, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, a long lesson of anguish. Well, I have learned it by heart now. You need not teach me any more. I suppose this last demand is by way of finishing my education. It was finished long since, long since; I do not want to know any more. I am crammed full of that kind of knowledge; I have graduated in pain, I refuse to take any further lessons. No," she went on, as she saw he was about to speak, "let be, let be. I have said my say, and I have done. All the discussion in the world, all the argument, all the pain and suffering cannot help me now; I have learned my lesson too thoroughly to try and take a fresh reading of life."

She swept out of the room, leaving him thunder-struck. I can find no words which will adequately describe his pure and unadulterated astonishment. He was as intensely surprised as a butcher might be if the timid sheep or the innocent young calf was to suddenly turn and upbraid him with his trade. His

son might be independent, that was natural; and he even, in his heart of hearts, admired Matt that he had so little sway over him. His daughters might be rebellious and headstrong, he was determined to match them and to outwit them; but I do not think that surprise had much to do with his feeling towards them. But that his wife, Margaret, Margaret who had loved him and looked up to him and yielded to him in every possible way since the day thirty years ago when he had first seen her, a slim, young, fair-haired girl, with soft dove's eyes and delicate apple-blossom cheeks, that she should turn upon him and rend him, as it were, limb from limb, that she should scathe and scorn him with her mother-love,—oh, it was incredible, astounding, preposterous! It was but an hour or two since Matt had taunted him that Rachel was a chip of the old block, his own daughter; but surely if she had inherited certain qualities of resistance and will from him, she had also inherited from her mother some traces of a power of which he had never even suspected the existence before.

“She does not know,” he said, aloud to the dishes and the decanters; “if she knew, she would understand. As it is, she has always been fighting against—against the past.”

He pushed away his wine-glass, which stood there just as the butler had filled it, and rose heavily from

his chair, crossing the hall with an uncertain and feeble step like a man who had suddenly aged ten years. And there, in his library, he seated himself in the great carved chair, and set his dazed brain to think out all that had happened. So she had turned against him at last, that meek and patient one who had stood so long at the door of his heart waiting until he should open it and bid her enter. So she was tired of the quest; she had come to feel that the long-desired favour was not worth striving for. She meant in the future to go her own way,—she who had always been content to travel along the path chosen by him. The knowledge would have softened most men, but the heart of Edward Gorman was only made the harder. After all, she had been his wife for nearly thirty years, she had enjoyed the position for which that other one had craved so sorely that she had died for the loss of it. And during all that time, although she had chosen to subserviate her will to his, there had never been one to say nay to her. So this was the effect of Rachel's rebellion,—that the wife who had been everything to him, his right hand, his willing slave, his admirer, his comfort, everything but the love of his heart, had turned against him. This was what his teaching had come to; and in his old age he was to be set at naught, thwarted and defied under his own roof by those who lived upon him; and he who had been

master not only of his own house, not only in his own business, but whose lightest word had been law even in his religion, was to be dethroned, and his place usurped by a foolish girl's fancy for a man upon whom she had never set eyes but a few weeks before.

So the old man's heart, while it was heavy, yet grew hard within him, and as with trembling hands he sought the counterfeit presentment of her who had never grown old, who had died young for love of him, he registered a fresh vow that so long as he was alive he would strive for the end which he believed to be right.

"Little Annie, little Annie," he murmured to the picture, "they don't understand me; nobody but you really knew me; and I have been all these weary years living a life of sham, living in a state as unreal as it was unsatisfying, believing that because my pain was lulled to sleep for a little while that it was no longer there. But I will keep my word for your sake, so that, when we meet again, I can tell you truly that I never forgot the promise that I made to you. Oh, little Annie, little Annie, you who died when they tore you from me, you would have understood, and you alone."

So he stayed there for a long, long time, resting his white head upon his arms, going back in a reverie that was half ecstasy, half pain, to those days gone

by when the dark-haired girl was still alive, when he and she had been young and their hearts full of love. But no good angel came to tell him that the words he had spoken to the miniature were true enough, to remind him that little Annie would have understood him, aye, but that she would have understood his daughter Rachel still better.

And so his heart grew harder and harder, his will stronger and more determined, his whole nature more ready for the battle which lay before him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON A NEW ROAD.

There is nothing in the world so obstinate as a man who prides himself on being firm.

WHEN Mrs. Gorman swept out of the dining-room, leaving her husband almost struck dumb with amazement, she did not, as might have been expected in a woman so suffering and so overstrained, show any signs of faintness or collapse. On the contrary, she went straight to her own little sitting-room and rang the bell.

"Oh, William," she said to the servant who answered it, "I want the brougham at once,—that is, as soon as it can be got ready. The time now is a quarter-past two,—say three o'clock."

"Very good, ma'am. Will you be at home to visitors, ma'am, later?"

"Not this afternoon, William; I shall be out some little time. If you see Louise, send her to me."

Before the maid could make her appearance, however, Matty came in search of her mother.

"Oh, you are here, dear," she said, in a tone of relief. "I wondered where you were. What are you going to do to-day?"

"I am going out," said Mrs. Gorman.

"Do you want me to go with you?"

"Not this afternoon, dearest child. I am going to 'The Larches,' and you cannot go there."

For a moment Matty was almost too much astounded to speak.

"But—but——" she stammered.

"Yes, I know; your father has forbidden you and your sisters to go there. Well, you must do as he tells you. Your father has laid no embargo upon me; but, of course, he could not do so, and if he did . . . Oh, well, dear child, I cannot discuss it with you; what your father wishes you to do does not in any sense apply to me."

"And you going to see Rachel?"

"Yes, I am going to see Rachel,—I must see her. I have ordered the carriage, and Louise will be here in a minute."

"Let me put your things out," said Matty.

"No, no, dear; don't interfere with Louise. She knows where everything is."

Matty was thunderstruck at the calmness of her mother's demeanour. She knew, as well as if she had been present at the interview between her father and mother, that her father's embargo on her own movements and those of her sisters had been intended to apply to her mother. She knew that under ordinary circumstances her mother would have un-

hesitatingly accepted such an embargo as a perfectly natural and unquestionable decision. And, in truth, Mr. Gorman himself was not more utterly astonished at his wife's sudden accession of will-power than his eldest daughter was.

In due course of time Mrs. Gorman, arrayed in her smartest visiting-gown, went downstairs and got into the neat little brougham which was waiting at the entrance-door. She gave the order, "To 'The Larches,'" without any attempt at concealment, and a few minutes later found herself at the door of Matthew's house. And at "The Larches" she remained for some little time, not discussing the situation, but simply accepting Brooke Barty, whom she found there, as her future son-in-law.

"Don't ask me to talk things over," she said to him, "because I neither can nor will do that; but, believe me, that I have had no such good news for many a long day as that you and my dear child have agreed to cast in your lots together. I am so sorry that her father should see things in such a different light to her and to me!"

So it was armed with the light of Mrs. Gorman's approval that Brooke Barty went off to London to consult his lawyer as to the best way of safely making Rachel his wife. And Mrs. Gorman, feeling more happy and satisfied in her mind than she had done for many a long day,—never, indeed, since the

shadow of John Strode had first arisen upon her horizon,—went back to the Abode to take up the burden of life once more.

She was too dignified a woman to quarrel or sulk with her husband, and she met him at the dinner-table precisely as if nothing had happened. He, who had spent most of the time since they had parted sitting in the big chair of the library in communion with his lost love, was feeling crushed and weary, as if the times were altogether out of joint with him. Indeed, he had come, poor gentleman, to pity himself very much, and to feel that it was cruelly hard upon him that his family could not be at one with him on every point. Mrs. Gorman spoke to him several times on casual matters, and he presently asked her if she had been out during the afternoon.

“Yes, I have been out,” she replied. She did not, as the three girls were present, tell him that she had been to “The Larches,” but after dinner, when they had left the room, she lingered a moment, waiting, indeed, until the door had closed behind them. “Edward,” she said, when they were alone, “you asked me whether I had been out. I did not tell you where I had been, because I did not think it necessary to do so before the girls. I have been to see Matthew,—Matthew and Rachel.”

He was struck by no sense of her innate honesty ;

he only felt that she was as a docile animal which had taken the bit between her teeth and meant to go whither she would.

"Very good," he said. "I have set no limit on your coming and going. It is not necessary to tell me where you have been."

"Not at all," she replied, sharply, and yet with an air of dignity which was as new as her sudden development of will power, "but I wished you to know. There has never been, and there never will be, any secret about my comings and goings."

"If you ask my approval——" he began.

"No, Edward; pray say no more on the subject. I neither ask your approval nor any longer dread your disapproval. I wished you to know, that is all; no more." And then, before he could speak, she passed out of the room, closing the door very gently behind her.

That was the beginning of a new era in the lives of Mr. and Mrs. Gorman. From that time forward she was, as she had never been before, the mistress not only of the house but of her own life. From that time forward he asked her no questions as to her comings and goings, and she volunteered no information. Outwardly she was the same; between themselves each knew that there was a great gulf fixed which possibly might never be bridged over again in this world.

So time went on. Mrs. Gorman paid frequent visits to her son's house, but the three girls never once crossed the threshold. Matthew and his father met in business hours on what was apparently quite the old footing; but Matthew never went to the Abode of Peace, and not one of the family set foot within the sanctuary of the Peacemakers. And Sunday after Sunday Mr. Gorman sat alone, tall, erect, and forbidding, in the pew which had once been filled with a dutiful and affectionate family. And the rest of the community sat looking on in wonder, while the white-haired old pastor preached the Gospel of Peace and exhorted his hearers to brotherly and Christian love. Many curious glances were cast at the tall old man sitting with folded arms, with his dark, burning eyes fixed upon the preacher; but none knew the bitterness of the heart within, the heart from which peace had spread her white wings and flown for ever.

"What is going on at the Abode?" said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs to Mrs. Wilson one day, when they had seen Mr. Gorman stalking away with little more than a wave of the hand by way of greeting to the gathering of the faithful.

"Eh, my dear, it's a sad thing to see a 'appy family broke up like that," cried Mrs. Wilson. "It makes one doubt whether the belief of the Peacemakers is as powerful as I thought it was."

"It's a blessed belief," said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, unctuously.

"Yes, my dear, it is a blessed belief; you are quite right there. But somehow it doesn't seem to be bringing manifold blessings to 'im as founded it. I'm sure 'is looks this morning is enough to make one's very 'eart ache."

"He looks to me heart-broken," said Mrs. Johnson-Biggs. "I did my best to give him comfort."

"There is no giving of comfort," said Mrs. Wilson, solemnly, "when the very foundations is rotten at the core."

"Whatever can that pretty young thing see in John Strode?"

Mrs. Wilson turned a broad face of genuine astonishment upon the speaker. "Why, my dear Mrs. Biggs," she exclaimed, "you don't mean to say that you've been all this time thinking that Rachel Gorman was willing and wishful to marry young John Strode?"

"Of course she is."

"Oh, my dear, my dear, you've got the wrong end of the story altogether. It's John Strode that wants to marry 'er, and it's John Strode that 'er father wants 'er to marry. As for Miss Rachel, bless 'er sweet face, she never could abide the sight of 'im. And small wonder of it! I've known John Strode this many a year. 'E's just a match for that de

Kloof over at Arlington Towers,—the kind of fellow that would put 'imself to any pains to catch a girl that didn't want 'im, and then take a pleasure in breaking 'er 'eart as soon as 'e'd got 'er."

"I assure you, my dear Mrs. Wilson, that you are absolutely wrong."

"I assure you, my dear Mrs. Biggs, that I'm perfectly right."

"I had it from Mr. Gorman himself——"

"No, no, my dear; you didn't——"

"You doubt my word——" began Mrs. Johnson-Biggs, in an offended tone.

"No, no, my dear, I don't doubt your word; you heard wrong, that's all. I had it from the dear pet herself. It's the master that wants 'er to marry John Strode."

"Do you really mean it?"

"I mean it as sure as I'm standing 'ere on my two feet this minute."

"But what can be his object?"

"Goodness only knows. Some people might think it was money. But I don't believe it's the money. Mr. Gorman is too well off and too safely established to care a brass farthing whether 'is daughters marry money or whether they don't. But the simple truth is that 'e's promised 'er to John Strode and she's promised 'erself to young Mr. Brooke Barty."

"You don't mean it!"

"But I do mean it; of course I mean it. And small blame to the poor child."

"Are you quite sure, Mrs. Wilson?"

"Perfectly sure. I 'ad it from the dear lamb 'er-self."

A dull, burning blush arose in Mrs. Johnson-Biggs's thin cheeks as she recalled how she had conveyed, in all sincerity of purpose, the news of Rachel's affair with Brooke Barty to her father. She remembered how coquettishly she had told him,—well, she did not herself use that phrase even in her own mind, so perhaps I ought not to use it either,—but she remembered in how sprightly a manner she had conveyed to him that he need not worry about Rachel's partiality for John Strode, as there was a most promising flirtation going on with young Mr. Brooke Barty. She remembered, too, how he had shut her up,—yes, shut her up; it was the only term which would adequately convey his manner on receipt of the news. Well, it was no use thinking about it, blushing about it; it was no use to feel hot all over, to wish that she had left well alone and minded her own business. It was done, and it could not be undone. She had made a mistake,—a great mistake.

"Well, I am very sorry," she said to Mrs. Wilson, putting out both her hands, and speaking very impressively; "it is always sad, dreadfully sad, to hear

of disunion in families, more especially those who have been happy and united. I should have thought, myself, that Mr. and Mrs. Gorman would have been both better pleased to have Mr. Barty as a son-in-law than John Strode. Thank goodness, my own children will not be troubling me on such matters for another ten years or more. I have often heard you wish that you had a dear little girl of your own; perhaps you are just as well off without."

"Oh, well, it's as the Lord wills it," replied Mrs. Wilson, easily; "but if I'd 'ad a dozen little girls, I'd 'ave let 'em 'ave the men o' their 'earts. Marriages is between them as makes 'em, Mrs. Biggs, and you might as well set three cooks to make a decent omelette as set more than two people to make a 'appy marriage."

"William," said Mrs. Wilson to her spouse, as she waddled down the road beside him, "never in my life did I see a woman so fairly took aback as Mrs. Biggs was when I told 'er about the master wanting Miss Rachel to marry young John Strode. She seemed as if she couldn't believe it. She told me she'd 'ad it from the master's own lips, and she flushed up as red as a turkey cock. Now I wonder what she's been up to."

"Oh, nothing at all," said Mr. Wilson, genially, "nothing at all. She was a bit took aback and astonished; she might well be that."

"You're right, she well might; I was myself, but not in that way, not to go red all over my face and look as if I 'ad completely put my foot in it, as she did. It's my opinion, William, that Amelia Biggs 'as been putting 'er finger in a pie that's no business of 'er's,—that's my opinion."

"Then take care you don't do the same, old woman."

"Me! Nay, I've ower much sense," she retorted. "Ye know, William, it's just what the Dean says,—Peacemaking is all very well for them that 'asn't any troubles, and it's all very well as long as things goes smooth; but when things begins to go a bit jerky, what's the result? Master comes to sanctuary by 'imself."

"It does seem like it," said Wilson, reflectively. "Yes, it seems like it, it does. But, lor, what can he be thinking of to want that pretty young thing to take up with John Strode? It's past comprehension."

"Yes, it is."

"I don't know whether it has struck you, missis, but I think the master's failing very fast."

"No, I don't think 'e's failing," replied Mrs. Wilson, "but I think 'e's worried. 'e's got a worried look about 'im; 'e used to be so easy, so ready with 'is greetings,—the Lord's peace be on you,—and 'e used to say it as if 'e meant it. It's what the Dean

says, William, it's all very well to make a little religion of your own, to suit your own ways when you're in prosperity and 'ealth, but you're better in the old tracks when troubles come along."

"I doubt you're right," said William Wilson, "and I doubt the poor old master's beginning to find it out. But, old woman, it isn't what I call consistent with genuine Peacemaking to want your girl to marry against 'er feelings and 'er inclinations. Marriage never was intended for that and marriage never was meant for that. It ought to be a union of 'earts. That should be the first principle of marriage, Polly,—a union of 'earts."

"And it seems to me," said Mrs. Wilson, sensibly, "that the first principle of Peacemaking should be to let young folks start fair when they venture into matrimony. That silly Amelia Biggs, what always makes me think of a goose with a nick in 'er neck, 'as set me thinking, William," the old lady continued. "I've always wanted to 'ave a little girl of my own,—a dear little girl that I could dress and pet and make much of, and love and be proud of and do for; but maybe it's all for the best that the Lord never gave us one. Eh, dear, she might 'ave wanted to marry somebody that I didn't like, and I might 'ave wanted to marry 'er to somebody as she didn't fancy; and so it might 'ave been worse than being without. For you and me, Wilson, although

we've—we've 'ad our rubs and our troubles and our trials, there's one point that we've always thought alike on,—it's what you said just now, Wilson,—marriage ought to be a union of 'earts."

CHAPTER XXV.

HURRAH !

I wonder why wise people who make books and saying for the benefit of those less wise than themselves should always lay such stress on "doing"? It is so easy to do. One may make or mar one's life in a minute, and it takes even less time than that to break either a leg or a neck. But undoing,—ah, that is another matter !

MEANTIME the preparations for transforming Rachel Gorman into Mrs. Brooke Barty were proceeding merrily apace. On consultation with his lawyers, Brooke Barty had found that the process was a perfectly simple one, with but one mere chance by which Rachel's father might be able to keep them waiting until she was of full age.

"You must put the banns up in some out-of-the-way parish or parishes," the lawyer explained ; "on the whole, I think it would be better to do it in one parish than in two, and, barring the chance of your prospective father-in-law discovering that the banns are up and forbidding them, you can be tied up as legally as if your *fiancée* were twenty years older than she is."

"But they will have to be put up in her parish, the parish where she is staying," said Brooke Barty.

"Not a bit of it. Take a room in some house in

some parish,—say St. Sepulchre's in the East or Bromley or Clapton,—Clapton is a nice out-of-the-way part,—and take another room for yourself, either in an adjacent parish or in the same, but don't take them in the same house. Put some belongings of your own in the room you take in your own name and some belongings of your *fiancée's* in the room you take in her name, and, ten chances to one, your future father-in-law will never hear that the banns have been put up. When you are once married he will not be very likely to raise any point as to the legality."

"What point could he raise?"

"Well, he might say that you were not really living in that parish; he might try to prove that you had neither of you been actually in residence at the addresses you give. Of course, if necessary, you can actually live for the time in the parish in which your banns are cried; but the chances are that if you did so, he would smell a rat and would set people on to the track at once. By far your best plan is simply to take the rooms and leave the rest to chance."

Accordingly the following Sunday at the Church of St. Mildred the Martyr, which was a new district church situated in a most populous part of a North London suburb, among a list of eight or nine others, the banns of marriage were published "between

Brooke Barty, bachelor, and Rachel Gorman, spinster, both of this parish." The congregation was a poor one, the neighbourhood one in which people might live for ten years and not so much as know the names of their next door neighbours, and not one living soul in the church took the smallest interest in or notice of this marriage any more than the others which were published at the same time. Nobody even speculated as to who Brooke Barty, bachelor, or Rachel Gorman, spinster, might be. A good lady of acidulated appearance in a semi-genteel row of houses known as Garden Terrace could have told the curious, had there been any, that she had let her best rooms for a month to a young lady guaranteed to give her no trouble, and a short, stout elderly, widow, living in Malcolm Villas,—quite half a mile from Garden Terrace,—could have supplied information as to the exact parochial *pied à terre* of Brooke Barty, bachelor. Brooke Barty had, without explaining the precise situation to his landlady, taken possession of his new quarters, and, indeed, had slept there on two separate occasions; and a slight, fair lady, wearing a golden brown costume, much trimmed with sable, had taken possession of the rooms in Garden Terrace. She, too, had left several books inscribed Rachel Gorman, and a hand-bag containing a change of clothing.

"And, of course, if anybody should make any en-

quiry, it is not necessary to say whether the rooms are slept in or not, is it?" Flo enquired.

"Oh, dear, no, miss," cried the landlady, who, not unnaturally, took Flo for the bride-elect. "If the rooms is took and paid for and kept clean, nothing else is nothing to nobody. Any one who comes 'ere poking and prying—and, lor, them parsons do poke and pry nowadays, very different to what they used to be in my time—I'll just say that Miss Gorman is the sweetest young lady I've had the pleasure of serving for a long time, and, if necessary, I'll just take and show 'em the night-gown laid out on the bed, and the brush and comb stood ready on the dressing-table. But, lor, miss, don't you worrit; nobody will ask a thing."

Flo was so struck with the ingenuity of laying out the night-dress on the bed and the brush and comb on the dressing-table that she slipped an extra douceur into the hand of the acidulated lady.

"Then I may depend upon you," she said; "and, believe me, I am most obliged to you for letting me have these nice rooms. I only wish I could come and live in them."

"Ah, indeed, and I wish so too. Perhaps when you're married, miss——"

"Ah, I'm afraid my home will be in the country," said Flo, who thought it was better not to explain too much the position of affairs. "But possibly I

may come up and spend a night or two here with a friend."

"The bridesmaid, perhaps?"

"Well, not exactly the bridesmaid, but she is a great friend," said Flo, edging away towards the door.

Apparently nobody took the trouble to enquire whether there was a young lady staying at No. 10 Garden Terrace or a young gentleman at No. 2 Malcolm Villas, for the three necessary weeks passed over without any enquiry, and on the three necessary Sundays the same announcement was heard in the Church of St. Mildred the Martyr as to the future intentions of Brooke Barty, bachelor, and Rachel Gorman, spinster.

These preparations were kept a dead secret from everybody but Flo and Matthew.

"I think I really must have a new dress to be married in," said Rachel, doubtfully, when they had fully fixed on the date for the wedding.

"Oh, yes; you can't be married in an old dress; you'll have no luck," cried Flo.

"I think you're very foolish to be buying a new dress now; it's sure to arouse suspicion," objected Matt.

"I might get it in London."

"Oh, surely, Matt, she could have a smart new walking-dress," said Flo. "Do you suppose that Briggs, the tailor, is going to trot round to the

Works and tell your father that the girl is going to have a new dress? The girls all have their own allowance. Does your father ever trouble as to how you spend your money?"

"Oh, never."

"Then I should have a new tailor-made dress; you'll feel so miserable in an old one. I know men think it doesn't matter. All men are alike; all men who are going to be married say, 'Oh, don't bother about it; don't buy anything now; I'll give you anything you want afterwards.' But women don't feel like that."

"I will buy her anything she wants afterwards," cried Brooke Barty at this point; "at least, I'll give her as much money as she likes, and she can buy what she wants."

"Oh, yes, dear boy, it's not that,—it's not quite the same thing, is it, Rachel?"

"Well, I would rather be married in a new dress," said Rachel, though she was obviously not very keen on the subject of new clothing. "I think I'll get a new dress at Briggs's and trust to chance for it's not seeming to look like a wedding-dress."

Indeed, her choice was sober enough, and neither Mr. Briggs nor any of his myrmidons guessed that the simple gown of tabac brown for which Miss Rachel Gorman was fitted about this time was, in truth, her wedding garment.

The secret was well kept. Not a word escaped the lips of the four conspirators. Rachel did not see her sisters excepting once or twice by chance on the street, and all Brooke Barty's preparations were made in London itself.

"We won't even think about a house until we are married," he said, one evening on his return from town, when he had brought half a dozen cases containing beautiful jewellery for her acceptance. "That can be done afterwards just as well as before. When we come back again we will put up at the 'Mitre;' for I am sure we have inflicted ourselves long enough upon Matt and his wife."

He forebore to say what was in his mind, that when they came back again he would wish to have his wife to himself; but that is neither here nor there.

As for Rachel, she acquiesced in everything. So long as she could get the barrier of Brooke Barty's name and arm put between her and John Strode she cared little for the actual manner in which the barrier might be made a perfectly legal one. The marriage was the thing, not the details thereof.

In an ordinary way, Matt would, of course, have preferred to go with his wife and his sister to London and see the knot safely tied. But he felt that it would not do for him to be absent from the Works for so much as a single day lest his father's sus-

pitions should be aroused and possibly some watch set upon his sister's movements. Therefore, when the appointed day came, Flo went off to London alone with Rachel. They left by the mail at nine o'clock, Matt seeing them off and safely settled in a reserved carriage. It was by the merest chance that some one else did not see them also, for as he went out of the station he ran against William Biggs, who was just sauntering in.

"Ah, Mr. Matthew, is that you?" he said.

"Yes, William. What are you doing gadding about the station?"

"I came down to buy an evening paper, Mr. Matthew," replied Biggs.

"Well, I've just got one; here it is; it was the last."

"But don't you want it?"

"No, no; I only bought it for idleness."

He thrust the paper into the elder man's hand in a way that admitted of no refusal.

"But you came down on purpose to get it, Mr. Matthew," he remarked, as a last feeble objection.

"I didn't; no, on my honour, I didn't. I came down to see a friend off. I bought it from sheer idleness, on my honour I did. Take it with a clear conscience, William; I'd ask you for it back if I really wanted it."

The two turned and walked out of the station together, and along the road as far as their ways went

together, and as Matthew, after parting with William Biggs, went along the quiet suburban road to his own house, he chuckled to think how near a shave it had been of the whole situation being laid bare to one who, with the best intentions in the world, might chance to set his father on the track.

Meantime, Flo and Rachel were pleasantly speeding along their road to London.

"I'm so glad we got safely away," cried Flo, who was much the most excited of the two.

"Oh, yes. Why should anything happen? Nothing ever does."

"It might. One never knows."

The girl did not answer. She put her head back against the cushions of the carriage as if she were very tired. Flo looked at her in some astonishment.

"Why, my dear, how little excited you are! Nobody would dream that you were just running away from home!"

"I am excited," said Rachel, "but my case is too serious to be foolishly excited about it. I am excited at getting out of John Strode's clutches for ever, but I am not in the least excited at marrying Brooke. Besides, what would be the good if I were? If I were you, Flo, I would tuck your feet up and go to sleep; you will want all your strength to-morrow."

But sleep was very far from Flo's eyes. She found

herself wondering whether those whom they had left behind had got any inkling of their intent, and whether they might not find a detective at the other end of the line who would politely recommend Miss Rachel to go quietly with him, and express his sorrow at the unpleasant duty he was called upon to perform. She thought of all sorts of preposterous and unlikely contingencies, forgetting quite that however stern a father might be, however set against a daughter's marriage, he could not quite treat her as if she were a criminal escaping from justice.

And nothing happened. They reached the terminus without let or hindrance, and Brooke Barty met them in quite his ordinary manner, as if they were merely coming up to do a couple of theatres and a little shopping. They went to an hotel in Holborn, where Mr. Barty had already taken rooms for them; he had also ordered supper,—a very modest little meal, as he apologetically explained. And then they parted for the night, to meet again the following morning at the Church of St. Mildred the Martyr.

"I feel most horribly conspiratorial and guilty," exclaimed Flo, as they got into the cab at the North London Station, which was nearest to the church. "And you, you wretched child, you look as happy and as calm as if you'd been married every day of your life for the last ten years."

"I don't see why you should feel conspiratorial,"

said Rachel, glancing at her sister-in-law. "We've been driven to what we are doing, and if nobody interrupts us I shall be safe. Think of it! For all my life I shall never be pursued by John Strode any more!"

"Oh, nothing will happen," cried Flo, assuming an air of assurance which, in truth, she was very far from feeling.

She was right, however, for nothing did happen. Brooke Barty met them at the church and a great friend of his, who had come to be his best man,—one Mr. Reginald Croft. Brooke Barty had already given him an outline of the situation, and if Reginald Croft thought his friend somewhat of a fool he kept his opinion to himself. But when he saw Rachel, so tall, so fresh, with her dewy eyes, her soft silky hair, and her wonderful rose-and-lily skin, he understood all at once why Barty had been so anxious not to lose her.

"It is very hard upon you not to have a bridesmaid," said Flo, as they passed into the church together.

"But you are the bridesmaid!"

"I? No; I'm her sister-in-law."

"Oh, I see. I thought you were Miss Gorman."

"No; Mrs. Gorman, her sister-in-law. That's what I say is so hard upon you. Best men always look for a bridesmaid. But—— Oh, here's the clergyman."

It does not take very long to unite a couple in holy matrimony, and it seemed an incredibly short time, even to those who were so anxious that the end should be accomplished, before the words came,—"be not afraid with any amazement."

"I suppose we are all safe now," whispered Rachel, as they went towards the vestry.

"I suppose so; at all events, we shall be as soon as the books are signed."

But there was no need of even the smallest qualm. The four waited in the vestry while the clergyman and the clerk got the books ready for signing, then the signatures were appended, and nothing on this side of the grave, excepting their own act, could sever the two who had thus plighted their vows.

They drove back to the station, waited a few minutes for a train, and then went back to the hotel where the two ladies had slept. Their luncheon was awaiting them, with a wedding-cake sent from Buz-zard's and some flowers, including the orthodox orange blossoms, for Rachel to wear. There, too, they found the best man's present, a handsome bangle set with diamonds, a great diamond heart with R. B. in rubies, the gift of the bridegroom, a beautiful dressing-case from Matt, and several telegrams addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Brooke Barty.

"Before I sit down," said Brooke to Flo, "I must

just go and send Matt a telegram to let him know that all is over."

"There are forms on that table," said Flo, whose quick eyes had been wandering about the room.

"All right. Will this do?" He sat down and wrote, "Brooke Barty to Matthew Gorman, 'The Larches,' Mullingham. Brooke and Rachel safely married this morning."

"Yes, that will do," she said.

He signed his name at the bottom of the form, and then added one jubilant word to the message,—
"Hurrah!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

LOST!

It is a terrible thing when one feels that one has lived too long.

BROOKE BARTY did not content himself with sending a single message announcing the accomplishment of his marriage. At the same time that he sent one off to Matthew, now his brother-in-law, he also sent a similar message addressed to Mrs. Gorman at the Abode of Peace.

Mrs. Gorman received the message just when they were finishing luncheon. When William appeared carrying the missive upon a tray, Mr. Gorman instinctively stretched out his hand to take it.

"For me, William?"

"No, sir; for the mistress," was the reply.

Mr. Gorman looked surprised, but said nothing in the presence of the servant, for it must be confessed that telegraphic messages were not of frequent occurrence in Mrs. Gorman's life, excepting when her husband happened to be away from home, which was not very often. It must be confessed that, under existing circumstances, he did not like to ask her what was in the message. If there was one subject upon which he was more human than most others, it

was the desire to know the contents of a telegram, and after waiting a couple of minutes while William decorously fidgetted about the room, his curiosity got the better of him and he looked across the table at his wife.

"No bad news, I hope, Margaret?"

Mrs. Gorman rose from her chair. "For me, Edward, the very best news," she said. "Pass that to your father, Matty."

She did not wait to see the effect of the announcement, but went out of the room, followed by her daughters.

His wife's manner had told the old man what to expect, but some moments passed before he could sufficiently control himself to make himself master of its contents. Then, when William had finally departed, he braced himself for the effort and read the message. It seemed to be written in letters of fire.

"Brooke and Rachel safely married at the Church of St. Mildred the Martyr, London, N., this morning."

So they had outwitted him, and the darling scheme of his heart was rendered impossible for ever; and his wife, the woman he had believed to be his, to be all his, whom he had believed to have no thoughts, hopes, ambitions, or desires outside of his own, had spoken of it as the best possible news for her,—the happiest news that she could possibly receive! So this child and this young man, little

more than a stranger, had set their will up against his, and they had been too many for him. They had set him at naught, despised him, made little or nothing of him. And he had no choice but to submit. Well, he had lived too long; he had lived to be too old; his children, even those in their teens, knew better than he, who had lived a long and honourable life. It was time that he went away: it was a pity that he had not slipped quietly out of life a year or two back, when all the world that knew him would have held his name in honour, when his children would have revered his memory, and his wife would have said with truth that there had never been but one thought between them. They had got the better of him. How could he meet John Strode, to whom he had given his word? How could he endure to see this rebellious child and her bold young husband passing to and fro in the streets day by day, week in week out? He knew that all the world would expect that he should forgive her; he knew, although he had for years past shut himself up in a world of his own, in which his own will had been omnipotent, his own wishes omniscient, and the glory of Edward Gorman omnipresent, he knew that the sympathy of human nature would go out to the young couple who had taken the law into their own hands. And yet, while they had made him break his word to John Strode, he was not of necessity

obliged thereby to break his oath with regard to Rachel.

"From this moment," he said, banging his hand down upon the table, "I have only three daughters."

It had been good news to his wife, to Rachel's mother, to her who had upholden him during thirty long years, yes, it had been good news. The world would give her credit for her mother-love; the world would blacken him for a hard-hearted old man who wanted to traffic his daughter; the world would never understand. But the heart of Edward Gorman never softened in the smallest degree. No, the world might deride him, the world might blame him; that was likely enough, for the world would never realize or understand the pure justice of his motives, would never understand that he had made a vow and given a promise long years before that he would serve John Strode, come weal, come woe, at his own or any cost.

He wondered had they, those jubilant and triumphant ones in London, had they had the cruelty to send their message speeding over the wires that John Strode might know it as soon as anybody in Mullingham? He could not risk the chance of that; he must make an effort and see him—yes; he would have the coupé at once,—he would go and find him; he might be at the Club; if not, he would drive on to Arlington Towers; but it would be with an

effort. He felt as if his vitality was gone. His burning eyes wandered over the lunch-table. No, there was nothing there that could help him. Good claret, Niersteiner,—they were very well to drink with a meal, but they would put no life into a man who felt as if his life was ebbing away. He must have brandy. He looked round. Yes, it was there—on the sideboard; he must make an effort to get to it.

He was still sitting there when William came in. William coughed apologetically.

“I beg your pardon, sir; I thought that you had gone to the library.”

“Give me the brandy, William,” said Mr. Gorman, speaking in a thick, uncertain voice.

“With soda, sir?”

“Put it down there and leave me.”

“The master looks main queer,” remarked William to his special friend the cook, when he passed once more into his own regions. “I doubt there was bad news in that telegram the mistress got just now.”

“Master’s been failing for some time, let me tell you, William,” was the cook’s reply.

“Ah, he’s never been the same since he turned poor Miss Rachel out. Mark my words, Mrs. Bell, that no man, not even one that runs a praying-shop of his own, can afford to go agin his own flesh and blood. Master’s tried it, and it’s left its mark upon him.”

“I’ve no patience with that same praying-shop,”

said Mrs. Bell, speaking in very dry and decided accents. "I always found a good 'onest church or chapel, whichever 'appened to be 'andiest, good enough for me. I'm afraid, William, that in religion it's like everything else,—them as isn't satisfied with what they've got, they're like the bad workman that never 'as good tools."

Meantime, Mr. Gorman still sat there at the foot of the table, waiting to summon up courage to get into his library. He half-filled a tumbler with the brandy which William had set at his elbow. It was old and extremely good in quality, and Mr. Gorman tasted it ere he added water to it. He hesitated to dilute what he required to give him strength. He could not drink it neat, for he was not, and never had been, in any sense of the word a drinker. Then his eye fell upon a decanter of old port standing just in front of him. He had not noticed it before when glancing over the table. Without hesitation he filled up the tumbler with port and drank the mixture almost at a single draught. It was strong enough to make him wince as if he had been drinking some corroding spirit, strong enough to run like molten fire through his veins, to give him new strength, to make for the time a new man of him.

"Ah!" he said, taking a deep breath, "that has pulled me together, that has made a man of me once more."

He left his place then, going with fairly steady steps to the door and out into the hall. He reached the shelter of the library without encountering any of the family,—who, if the truth be told, were keeping purposely out of his road,—and there he shut the door behind him and crossed the great softly carpeted room to the table, where he sat himself down in the big chair alone with his purpose. For a few minutes he sat still, as if trying to nerve and recover himself. The strong drink that he had forced down his throat was still running in his veins like fire, but his head was clear, his purpose was definite. He drew a block of note-paper towards him and took his favourite pen from the tray which stood at his right hand. Then he wrote :

“MY DEAR JOHN STRODE,—This message, just received by my wife, will tell you that it is no longer in my power to keep the promise I made you and which I have done my best to further. From this moment I have no daughter Rachel, and I shall be much obliged to you if you will never speak of her to me again. I cannot recall any instance in the whole of my life in which I have hitherto failed to fulfil my promises and engagements. It is with shame that I write to you now to confess that my promise is broken and can never be carried out.

“I am,

“Yours faithfully,

“EDWARD GORMAN.”

He sealed the letter with his own signet and set it aside. Then he took his keys from his pocket

and opened a cupboard at the right side of the great desk. There was nothing there beyond two or three large books. One of these he took from the recess and laid it upon the table before him. It was a large Bible, a very beautiful volume bound and clasped with silver, and on the front page was written the date of his father's and mother's marriage, his own birth, his mother's death, the subsequent marriage of his father, his own marriage, and the births of his children. He read them all from first to last, and then he took up his pen again and dipped it once more in the ink. Through the name of Rachel at the end of the list he drew a thick and heavy line, writing at the end—"Lost," with the date of the day and the year. This done, he made a movement as if to take the blotting-paper which lay underneath the book; then he changed his intention and determined to wait until the ink was dry. And so he did; aye, until the ink was more than dry, for he sat there until the cold spring sunshine and the spring daylight darkened into gray, until the fire slowly died in the grate and the ink was dry, as dry as that of any of the entries which had been made before.

So, in the end, William found him, huddled up in the great chair, his inert body supported by the massively carved arms, the open Bible on the desk before him, and the letter to John Strode just where

he had laid it down. It was but the work of a moment to rouse the house ; to call out that Mr. Gorman was very ill, that he had had some kind of fit, to send one man for a doctor, another for brandy, to give a third servant orders to prepare his bed, to call for the mistress, to get him flat down upon the floor, to unloosen his collar and shirt, to bid some one fetch Mr. Matthew.

And in the midst of all this bustle Edward Gorman breathed heavily on, taking no heed of aught that passed, or of any one who came and went.

The doctor was there in a few minutes. "Apoplexy," he said at once to William. "Little or nothing to be done. Get hot bags and bricks to his feet and legs, and half a dozen mustard leaves to the nape of his neck ; but I am afraid it's all of little use. My dear Mrs. Gorman," he said, "what has happened to put your husband out?"

"He has been put out to-day, doctor ; my youngest daughter was married this morning."

"Against her father's wishes?"

"Well, yes."

"Against yours?"

"No, not against mine."

"You think he had the news?"

"Yes ; the news came just as we had finished luncheon."

She was like a woman walking in a dream. She

answered him in a hard, mechanical sort of way, as if she was repeating something she had learned by rote.

"This has been coming on for some time," he said, gently; "there is no doubt about that, and, possibly, this news may have hastened the end. I am afraid, my dear lady, that you must be prepared for the worst."

"You mean that he is dying,—that there is no hope?"

"There is always hope while there is life, but, at the same time, the thread of hope in a case like this, and in a man of your husband's age, is very, very slight. Have you a nurse at hand?"

"No. But I can send down to the institution."

"Then you had better send at once. I know that they have at least two in. If you will give me pen and ink I will write the note, so that the lady superior may know that the case is urgent."

"You had better get two if they can be spared," said Mrs. Gorman.

"Very good."

His own instinct told him that, in all probability, only one nurse would be required. However, the Gormans were rich people, and there was just a faint thread of hope, so that the lady's fancy might as well be gratified.

"Shall we get him upstairs into his own bed?"

"No, by no means. He must not be moved from where he is excepting on to a mattress. There is no need to carry him upstairs. Let some of your people bring down a bed into the library. You will find it more convenient on all accounts. I will stay and see him lifted on to it; indeed, I will stay until the nurses come."

There was really not very much to be done. The doctor, with quick professional hands, ripped off the old man's clothing, cutting ruthlessly that he might accomplish the task with greater ease and celerity, and with the aid of the two men-servants, he very soon got Mr. Gorman safely into the bed which they had brought down to the library for him. It took but little time to bring hot bags and bottles and put them to the poor unconscious feet, to plaster the back of the neck with mustard leaves. But it was all of little use. Mr. Gorman took no notice of those around him, and breathed heavily on, the breathing of one whose hours in this world were numbered.

It seemed to be only a few minutes before Matt came tearing up in the brougham from the Works. He was looking very white and scared, but his mother, who met him in the hall, was outwardly as calm as a rock.

"Was it the news that did it?" he asked.

"Yes, I am afraid it was."

"Did you have a telegram?"

"Yes."

"Did you give it to him?"

"Yes. He asked me for it."

"Poor little mother!"

She was not little, but she seemed so to Matt at that moment. He put his arms round her and drew her close to him.

"Dearest mother," he said, "is there no hope?"

"I am afraid—none."

"Where is he?"

"In the library. Dr. Carson won't allow him to be carried upstairs. They have brought a bed down. The nurses will be here in a few minutes; I have just had a message from the institution."

"Does he know you?"

"He knows nobody."

"Who is with him?"

"William has never left him, dear. I—I—I ought to be there. I'll go back there now."

"No, mother, stay quietly for a while with Matty; it cannot be necessary for you to be there if he is unconscious. I will go and stay there. Here is Matty coming downstairs.—Cannot you keep mother quietly for a little while until things are settled in that room?" he asked.

"I was just coming for her. Dear mother," she said, "you have had no tea; come back into the

morning-room and let me give you some, and then you will be more fit to go and stay there until, until——”

“Until the end,” finished her mother.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THIRTY YEARS OF WAITING.

The martyr whose poor body is shrivelled up in one quick, scorching flame is honoured for all time ; the martyr whose heart is slowly broken by a slow process of starvation is generally dismissed in a single curt phrase,—“ It was her own fault.”

As soon as he had seen his mother safely seated by the fire of the morning-room, Matthew Gorman left her to his sister's ministrations and went into the library. He had not had much experience of illness and none of death, but a glance was sufficient to show him that the sands of his father's life were fast running out.

“ Can you do nothing ? ” he said to the doctor, who was bending over the patient.

“ We are doing everything that we can,” was the guarded reply. Then he finished his particular task, and, straightening his back, shook hands with Matthew. Shook hands, did I say ? Well, he put one hand on his shoulder and grasped his hand with the other. “ My dear boy,” he said, in an undertone, “ your father is an old man, and the old must go before the young. He feels nothing ; he is not suffering, although that look is dreadful.”

“ Do you think he will come to again ? ”

“He may do so, but I should say it was most doubtful. By the bye, Matthew, I see that there are drawers and cupboards open there ; let me advise you, as you have strange nurses coming, and various people about, to lock everything up and put the keys in your pocket.”

Thus Matthew's attention was drawn to the desk at which his father had been sitting when William had found him. The first thing he noticed was the letter addressed to John Strode. This he slipped into his pocket without a single word. Then he perceived the great Bible lying open on the slope at which his father always wrote. His first thought was one almost of pride that his father's last act should have been one of reading the Scriptures, but a second glance showed him that he had evidently not been occupied with the contents of the Holy Book. No, there was the Book open at the pages which held the family record, and there was the thick black score passed through Rachel's name, and against it the entry “*Lost*,” with that day's date written underneath.

So his father's last act had been one not of peace but of war. He had kept his word, he had cut the girl off, blotting her out as ruthlessly as if she had committed some terrible and disgraceful crime. Well, at all events, his mother should not be pained by seeing that, for the present at all events, never, if he

could avoid it. So he shut the book with a bang and thrust it away into the depths of the cupboard where it was usually kept, turning the key in the lock and hiding the bunch of keys, of which it was one, in his own pocket. Then he went back to the doctor's side again.

And presently the nurses arrived and at once took up their places by the bed. And then Matty came, bringing her mother. And then the two girls, who had been out in the town, came home, to be greeted by the terrible news, and they stole in with white, scared faces, for they had never been in the presence of death before.

"I should like to send a message for Rachel," Mrs. Gorman whispered to her son. "They may have left the hotel; but surely we can find them somehow?"

"They will not be wanted," he replied.

"Supposing that your father should come to himself and ask for them?" she urged. "How terrible if they were not here!"

"He won't ask for them, dearest."

"You don't know that, Matt," she whispered back, painfully, "you don't know. Sometimes these fits pass off, and Dr. Carson is doing everything that is possible. Yes, nurse, I will move; yes, don't let me be in the road, because you know exactly what is wanted and I don't. At all events, Matt dear, send

them a wire at once. We may catch them. Tell them that your father is very ill, that they are to return at once. When is Flo coming back?"

"To-night. She is on her way now."

"Ah! Then we cannot get her any sooner. But do send that wire off at once; it is not six o'clock. Send it to the hotel where Flo stayed last night, and tell them, if they are gone, to forward the message without an instant's delay."

So Matt went out of the room to do her bidding, and the dreary watch went on.

It was late in the evening when Flo came, tired by her journey, yet full of pity and compassion for the anguish in her mother-in-law's eyes and the look of pain upon her blanched cheeks.

"Dear Mrs. Gorman," she said, "was it the news that caused this?"

"I am afraid so. And I gave it to him, Flo, I gave it to him. And I—I told him that it was the best news I could possibly have."

"Well, dear, you didn't know that this would happen. How could you? Why don't you come away for a little time? They will fetch you if there is any change. Come out into one of the other rooms; it is so bad for you sitting here. Do, dear Mrs. Gorman."

She suffered herself to be led out into the hall, but immediately, when she realized where she was,

turned and insisted on going back to the library once more.

"No, no, I must be there. He might come back to his own self again, and all might be as it used to be between us. I—I might be out of the room and miss it. I must go back. Don't keep me, Flo."

She felt that there was nothing to be done but allow the stricken woman to have her way.

So Margaret Gorman went back to her terrible vigil by the side of him who had been her all in all.

One by one the girls came creeping in, taking it in turns to sit with their mother, who never deserted her post. And towards morning there came a message from Brooke and Rachel at Dover, saying that the telegram had been received and that they were starting as soon as possible for home.

"If only she gets here in time I am sure he will forgive her," whispered Mrs. Gorman, turning tender eyes upon the inert figure on the bed. "Don't you think he will, Matt?"

"I hope so, dearest," said Matt.

He felt in the face of the scored-out name in the Bible that it was most unlikely his father would, if he came to his own senses again, relent in the smallest degree. But, he argued with himself, what was the use of harassing his mother with such information or such conjecture at a time like this,—at a time when she was more than half inclined to blame

herself at having been the cause of his father's illness?

"He has been so strange, so unlike himself lately," Mrs. Gorman went on; "but at heart he always loved peace."

"Yes, dear, yes. By the bye, would you like me to send for Mr. Melville?"

"Oh, yes, Matt; yes, dear boy, I am sure your father would wish it."

"I will go out and send now. No, dear, it is not too late. It would never be too late for him; he would be terribly upset if he thought that we should consider the hour at a time like this."

As Matt went across the hall his sister Matty came out of the morning-room.

"Oh, Matt, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson have just come, dear; they've just heard what has happened. They are in there. There is nothing that they can do, but it's awfully good of them to come. You might let mother know."

"Yes, of course, I will. I don't think she will come out of the room, because she's so afraid he may come to again and miss her."

In reality, Matthew Gorman knew that his mother was afraid that if his father came to his own senses again she might miss the spell of lucidity.

He sent one of the men off for the old pastor,—for none of the servants had gone to bed, but preferred

to wait about on the chance of anything being wanted. Then he went on into the morning-room, where Mr. and Mrs. Wilson were waiting.

"I 'ave only just 'eard the news, Mr. Matthew," Mr. Wilson began, huskily. "Is it as bad as they think?"

"It is as bad as it can be, Mr. Wilson. Mrs. Wilson, it's awfully good of you to have come,—my mother will be so grateful. If you will wait a minute, I will let her know that you are here."

"And if there is anything I can do, dear Mr. Matt, your mother knows—you know—I'm 'ere, and I'm ready to be made use of," the good woman exclaimed.

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Wilson; I will tell her."

"My dear," said Mrs. Wilson to Matty, "what 'as 'appened? What caused it? The master was all right this morning when 'e left the Works?"

"Oh, yes, he was quite fit," Mr. Wilson exclaimed.

"Well, Mrs. Wilson, the fact is—there was a telegram my mother had,—a telegram saying Rachel was married this morning. I'm awfully afraid it's upset my father more than we thought it would do."

"To Mr. Barty?"

"Yes; they were married this morning in London."

"Oh—oh—h—h! Then 'e took it to 'eart? Dear Miss Matty, I'm sorry for that, though I'm glad she's married, you know; but I'm sorry the master was put about over it,—I'm sorry 'e's taken it so sadly to 'eart, I am."

"I think my father did take things to heart, particularly when they went against him," said Matty. "At all events, my mother showed him the telegram after lunch, and William found him in the afternoon sitting quite unconscious in his chair before the desk in the library. Nothing seems to be any good that they try. The doctor has been with him ever since, and they've got two nurses, but he has not shown any signs of returning consciousness so far."

"And your poor ma?"

"Oh, poor mother—she was devoted to my father, you know, and she won't leave the room. Yes, he is in the library still; the doctor forbade his being moved upstairs; he said it was the only chance. So they brought a bed down into the library, and my mother is there now."

At this moment Matthew came back bringing his mother with him.

"I have persuaded her to come out and have something to eat. Matty dear, will you go and stay there, and if there is the least sign of any change come at once?"

"Yes, yes, I will."

Matty sped off like lightning, and Mrs. Gorman came slowly into the room. At the sight of Mrs. Wilson her face changed.

"How kind of you to come!" she said.

Mrs. Wilson made a rush towards her.

"My poor dear, my poor dear lady," she cried, "of course we came, Wilson and me! We were 'heart-broke to think of anything being amiss with the dear master. You'll let me stay with you? I'll not be any worry. I've been through troubles, my dear; I know what it is."

"Oh, yes, yes, you are both so kind," said Mrs. Gorman. "If only he comes to, if only he comes to, just to speak—just to say that he forgives the child for going her own way, where her heart led her. Oh, if only he forgives her, Mrs. Wilson, I shall be happy. But there he lies, hour after hour, never moving, knowing nothing, knowing nobody! It is dreadful—dreadful."

"'Ave you sent for the dear lamb?"

"Oh, yes; we telegraphed, and we have had an answer. They are on their way now. Oh, if only he lives to know her and to forgive her!"

She suffered them to draw her to the table and patiently tried to eat a little of what they set before her. Then she pushed away her plate and declared that she had had more than enough.

"I must go back," she said, half nervously. "Mrs.

Wilson, you will come in—you would like to see him?"

"I will come with you, my poor dear," said Mrs. Wilson. "And Wilson, too,—you'll let 'im see the master? It may be for the last time."

As they crossed the hall towards the library they saw William coming from the outer hall followed by the pastor of the sanctuary. His white hair was uncovered, and as he perceived the group coming from the morning-room he put up one hand in benediction.

"The Lord's peace be upon this house and all within it," he said, raising his eyes solemnly to heaven.

The words which fell from the lips of all who heard him were involuntary. "The Lord grant it."

It was Mrs. Gorman who first made a step forward.

"Dear friend," she said, putting out the hand nearest to him,—“dear friend, we have great need of you. He lies very ill; I am afraid he will know nobody again in this world; and I am praying that if he must pass into the Unknown, he may pass in peace with all that love him. Dear friend, you know the unhappy differences which have parted us as a family these last days. Rachel was married this morning in London. If he comes to, if you find that he knows you, if there is a chance, will you not, for

my sake, press forgiveness upon him? We have all need of it, and she and I most of any."

She led him into the great, dimly lighted library and up to the side of the bed where Mr. Gorman still lay inert and unconscious. Without a word, with no more than a look, the old pastor fell upon his knees and prayed.

"Oh, dear Lord God," he said, "Thou hast brought us face to face with one of Thy great mysteries. Let us die as we have tried to live—in peace with all men. Be Thou strong where we are weak, and if there be any who have wronged us, give us Thy grace that we may leave them with perfect love and forgiveness. Oh, dear Lord Jesus, who forgave them that didst despitefully use Thee, so help us weak and faltering ones that we may follow Thy blessed example and say with Thee, 'Thy will be done,' and 'Father, forgive them.' Let us die as we have lived, certain that Thou hast seen and will aid our weak endeavours. Let us be merciful as we hope and pray Thou wilt be merciful to us, that we may pass from this world of trouble, where only the reflection of Thy perfect peace can ever shine, to that land above where strife is unknown, and where the faithful made perfect in love may ever abide in a glorious peace which shall know no end, where the word forgiveness is unknown because there is nothing to forgive, where peace doth shine as the sun, and where Thou

art the fount and joy of all who have lived and died in Thee. Dear Lord God, if our brother, who to-night has set his feet upon the shore of the eternal ocean, be destined to pass away from us, grant that he may leave no trace behind of aught but that perfect love and peace which for many years it hath been his pride and his joy to inculcate among those around him here. Of Thine infinite mercy grant that he depart not, if it be Thy will to take him, without some word of farewell to his faithful wife. Her desire, dear Lord, is not one of self, it is the outcome of pure mother-love and honest faithful wifeness. Oh, dear Lord God, give this faithful heart a little of Thy Divine healing grace that she may carry through the years which may be left to her a blessed remembrance of Thy leniency and mercy. And this we ask not of ourselves, but by the human suffering and Divine tenderness of Thy beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

Perhaps it was the impassioned words in the wholly tender voice of the aged pastor that pierced through the gloom which over-pressed the brain of the sick man. At all events, as they all knelt around the bed, he was roused from his stupor. His wife was still kneeling beside the pastor, her clasped hands stretched over the coverlet, her sad strained face turned towards that of her husband, when his

eyes unclosed, and he fixed them upon her with a gleam of recognition.

"Dear God, thou hast answered my prayer!" she burst out. "Edward, Edward,—speak to me,—speak to me,—it is your wife!"

The doctor, who was still there, raised him a little, and he smiled upon her.

"Little Annie," he said, in a sweet far-away voice, "is it really you? It is such a long time since I saw you. I thought we should never meet again."

"Edward,—it is I,—your wife,—Margaret!"

"Little Annie," he went on, still looking upon her with that sweet mysterious smile, "I tried to keep my promise; I did my best to give your boy his happiness. They broke my heart. Little Annie, we meet again . . . Annie!"

The light in the dark burning eyes faded out; the head fell back against the doctor's shoulder; there was a dead silence.

Then the voice of the old pastor broke the silence.

"May God, in His infinite mercy, receive his soul."

The tears were streaming down William Wilson's face, his wife had hidden her eyes against the foot of the bed, the three girls were clinging one to another, and Flo was holding hard on to her husband's arm.

Then the new-made widow rose from her knees and stood watching the doctor as he laid all that was left of Edward Gorman back upon the pillows.

And so she stood, still as a statue, while not one, even of her own children, dared to move a step towards her, or put out a hand to touch her.

"I have waited thirty years," she said, in a hopeless and desolate tone, "for . . . *this!*"

She stretched out her arms to the still figure on the bed, as if to show the dead blank that was left after her years of waiting. Then she turned blindly away and went out of the presence of death, to face the rest of her life . . . alone!

THE END.

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